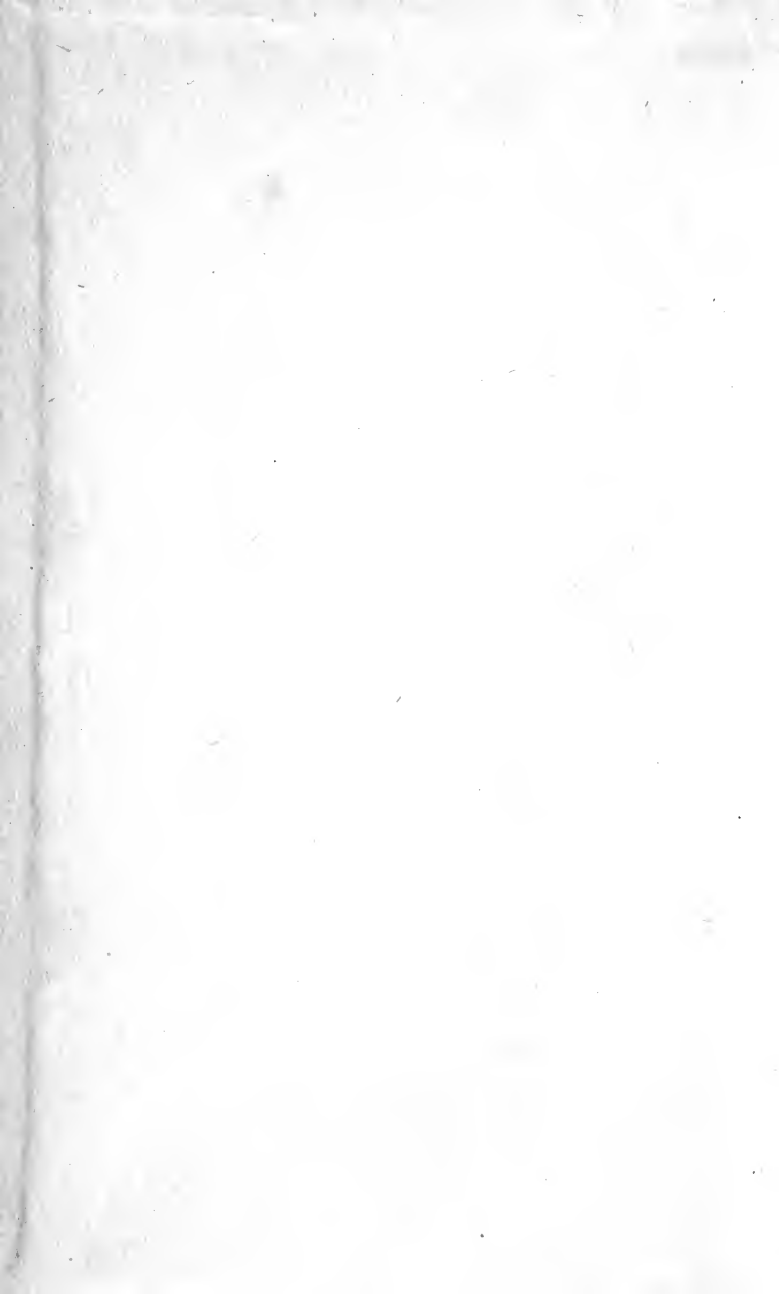


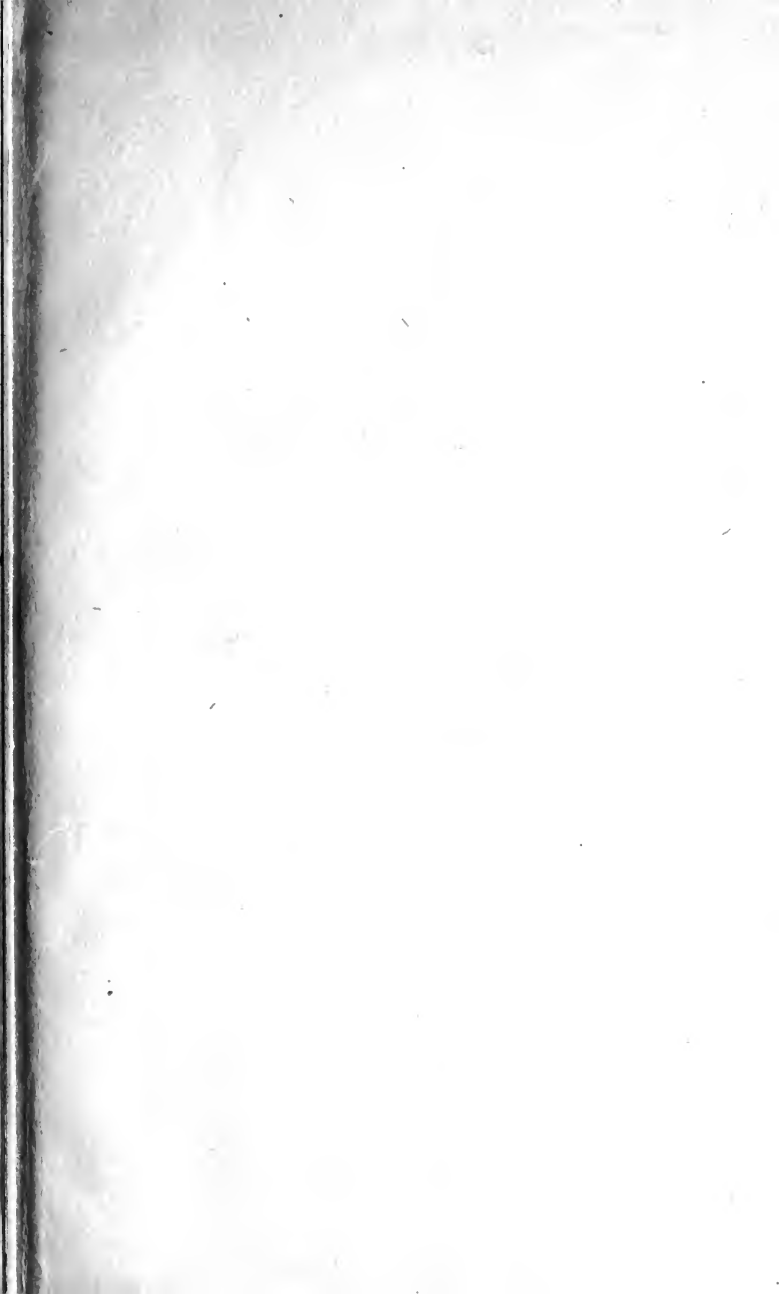
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**BY *EDWARD* W.**  
**KEITH LEASK**

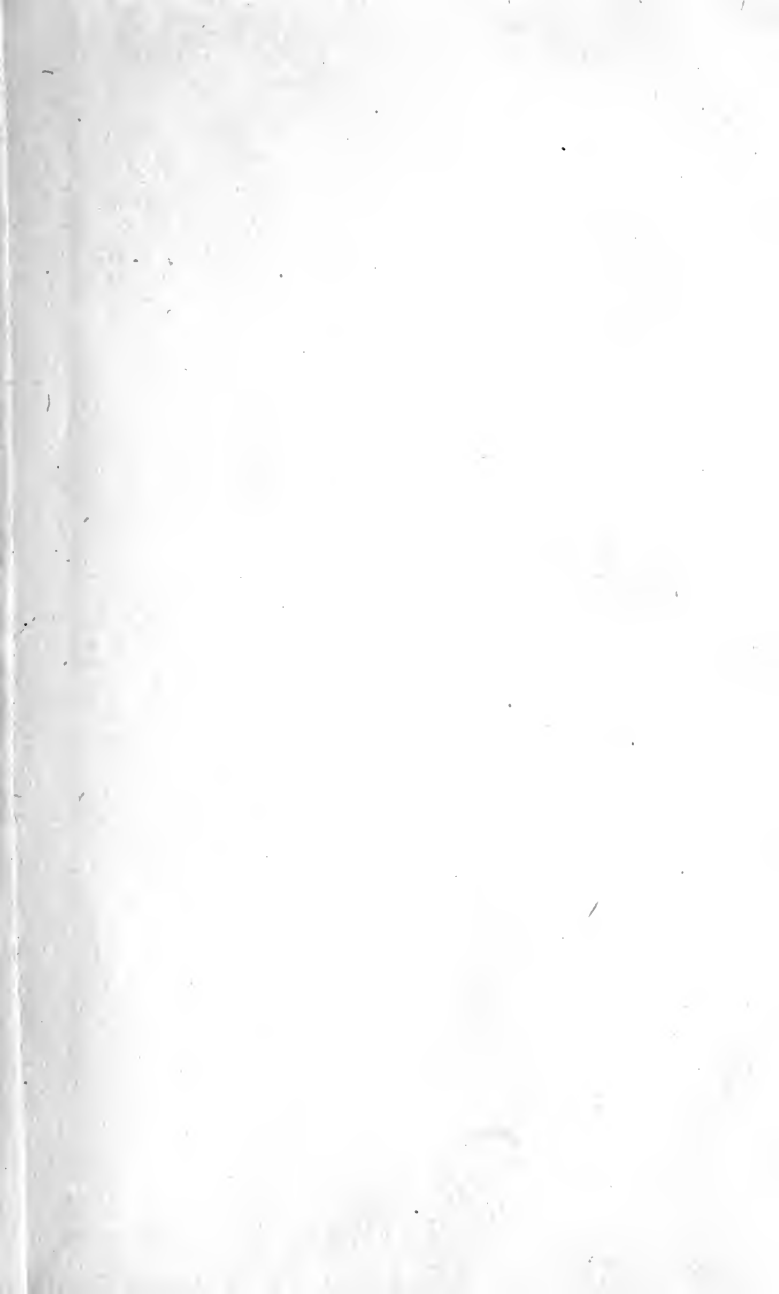


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To

GEORGE BIRKBECK HILL,

D.C.L. ;

M.A. Pembroke (Johnson's) College, Oxford ;

CHIEF OF JOHNSON SCHOLARS AND EDITORS ;

AND HIMSELF MOST "CLUBABLE" OF MEN.



## PREFACE

THE literature of the Johnsonian period has assumed, in spite of the lexicographer's own dislike of that adjective, prodigious dimensions. After the critical labours of Malone, Murphy, Croker, J. B. Nichols, Macaulay, Carlyle, Rogers, Fitzgerald, Dr Hill and others, it may appear hazardous to venture upon such a well-ploughed field where the pitfalls are so numerous and the materials so scattered. I cannot, however, refrain from the expression of the belief that in this biography of Boswell will be found something that is new to professed students of the period, and much to the class of general readers that may lead them to reconsider the verdict at which they may have arrived from the brilliant but totally misleading essay by Lord Macaulay. At least, the writer cherishes the hope that it will materially add to the correct understanding and the enjoyment of Boswell's great work, *the Life of Johnson*.

My best thanks are due to J. Pearson & Co., 5 Pall Mall Place, London, for the use of unpublished letters by Boswell and of his boyish common-place book. And if "our Boswell" could indulge an honest pride in availing himself of a dedication to Sir Joshua Reynolds, as to a person of the first eminence in his department, so may I entertain the same feeling in inscribing this sketch to Dr Hill who, amid the pressure of other Johnson labours, has yet found time to revise the proof sheets of my book.

W. K. L.

ABERDEEN, *December 1896.*

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# JAMES BOSWELL

## CHAPTER I

EARLY DAYS—MEETS JOHNSON. 1740-1763

‘Behind yon hills, where Lugar flows.’—BURNS.

‘EVERY Scotchman,’ says Sir Walter Scott, ‘has a pedigree. It is a national prerogative, as inalienable as his pride and his poverty. My birth was neither distinguished nor sordid.’ What, however, was but a foible with Scott was a passion in James Boswell, who has on numerous occasions obtruded his genealogical tree in such a manner as to render necessary some acquaintance with his family and lineage. The family of Boswell, or Bosville, dates from the Normans who came with William the Conqueror to Hastings. Entering Scotland in the days of the sore saint, David I., they had spread over Berwickshire and established themselves, at least in one branch, at Balmuto in Fife. A descendant of the family, Thomas Boswell, occupies in the genealogy of the biographer the position of prominence which Wat of Harden holds in the line of the novelist. He obtained a grant of the lands in Ayrshire belonging to the ancient house of Affleck of that ilk, when they had passed by forfeiture into the hands of the king. Pitcairn, in his *Collection of Criminal*

*Trials* is inclined to regard this ancestor as the chief minstrel in the royal train of James IV.; but, as he fell at Flodden, this may be taken as being at least not proven, nor would the position of this first literary man in the family have been quite pleasing to the pride of race so often shewn by his descendant. A Yorkshire branch of the family, with the spelling of their name as Bosville, was settled at Gunthwait in the West Riding, and its head was hailed as 'his chief' by Bozzy, whose gregarious instincts led him to trace and claim relationship in a way even more than is national. By marriage and other ties the family in Scotland was connected with the most ancient and distinguished houses in the land.

The great grandfather of the biographer was the Earl of Kincardine who is mentioned by Gilbert Burnet in his *History of His Own Time*. He had married a Dutch lady, of the noble house of Sommelsdyck who had once held princely rank in Surinam. With that branch also of the name did Boswell, in later years, establish a relationship at the time of his continental tour, when at the Hague he found the head holding 'an important charge in the Republick, and is as worthy a man as lives, and has honoured me with his correspondence these twenty years.' From the Earl Boswell boasted 'the blood of Bruce in my veins,' a descent which he seizes every opportunity of making known to his readers, and to which we find him alluding in a letter of 10th May, 1786, now before us, to Mickle, the translator of the *Lusiad*, with a promise to 'tell you what I know about our common ancestor, Robert the Bruce.' When Johnson, in the autumn of 1773, visited the ancestral seat of his friend, Boswell, 'in the glow of what, I am sensible, will in a commercial age be considered as a genealogical enthusiasm,' did not

forget to remind his illustrious Mentor of his relationship to the Royal Personage, George the Third, 'whose pension had given Johnson comfort and independence.' It would have required a much greater antiquarian than Johnson, who could scarcely tell the name of his own grandfather, to have traced the well-nigh twenty generations of connecting links between Bruce and the third of the Guelph dynasty on the throne.

From Veronica Sommelsdyck, the wife of this royal ancestor (whose title is now merged in the earldom of Elgin), was 'introduced into our family the saint's name,' born by Boswell's own eldest daughter, and other consequences of a much graver nature were destined to ensue. 'For this marriage,' says Ramsay of Ochtertyre, 'their posterity paid dear,' for to it was due, increased no doubt as it was through the intermarriages in close degrees between various scions of the house, the insanity which is now recognised by all students of his writings in Boswell himself, and which made its appearance in the clearest way in the case of his second daughter. His grandfather James adopted the profession of law in which he obtained some distinction, and left three children—Alexander, the father of the subject of this sketch, John, who followed the practice of medicine, and a daughter Veronica, married to Montgomerie of Lainshaw, whose daughter became the wife of her cousin Bozzy.

Alexander Boswell, Lord Auchinleck, married his cousin Euphemia Erskine. In the writings of the son the father makes a considerable figure, while his mother, 'of the family of Buchan, a woman of almost unexampled piety and goodness,' as he styles her, is but a dim name in the background, as with John Stuart Mill who has written a copious autobiography, and left it to the logical instincts of his readers to infer that he had a

mother. The profession of law was adopted by the father, who, after a residence abroad at Leyden where he graduated, passed as advocate at the Scottish bar in 1729, from which, after a distinguished career, he was appointed to the sheriffdom of Wigton, and ultimately raised to the bench in 1754, with the title of Lord Auchinleck. He possessed, says his son, 'all the dignified courtesies of an old baron,' of the school of Cosmo Bradwardine as we may say, and not only was he an excellent scholar, but, from the intimacy he had cultivated with the Gronovii and other *literati* of Leyden, he was a collector of classical manuscripts and a collator of the texts and editions of Anacreon. His library was rich in curious editions of the classics, and was in some respects not excelled by any private collection in Great Britain, and the reputation of the Auchinleck library was greatly increased by the black-letter tastes and publications of his grandson. A strong Whig and active Presbyterian, he was much esteemed in public and in private life. The son had on his northern tour the pleasure to note, both at Aberdeen and at Inverness, the high regard in which the old judge was held, and to find his name and connection a very serviceable means of introduction to the travellers in their 'transit over the Caledonian hemisphere.' Like the father of Scott, who kept the whole bead-roll of cousins and relations and loved a funeral, Lord Auchinleck bequeathed to his eldest son at least one characteristic, the attention to relatives in the remotest degree of kin. On the bench, like the judges in *Redgauntlet*, Hume, Kames, and others, he affected the racy Doric; and his 'Scots strength of sarcasm, which is peculiar to a North Briton,' was on many an occasion lamented by his son who felt it, and acknowledged by Johnson on at least one famous occasion. In the *Boswelliana* are preserved many of



old Auchinleck's stories which Lord Monboddo says he could tell well with wit and gravity—stories of the circuit and bar type of Braxfield and Eskgrove, such as Scott used to tell to the wits round the fire of the Parliament House. In his younger days he had been a beau, and his affectation of red heels to his shoes and of red stockings, when brought under the notice of his son by a friend, so affected Bozzy that he could hardly sit on his chair for laughing. A great gardener and planter like others of the race of old Scottish judges he had extended, in the classic style of architecture then in fashion, the family mansion, and had, as Johnson found, 'advanced the value of his lands with great tenderness to his tenants.' Past the older residence flowed the river Lugar, here of considerable depth, and then bordered with rocks and shaded with wood—the old castle whose 'sullen dignity' was the nurse of Boswell's devotion to the feudal principles and 'the grand scheme of subordination,' of which he lets us hear so much when he touches on 'the romantick groves of my ancestors.'

James Boswell, the immortal biographer of Johnson, was born in Edinburgh on October 29, 1740. The earliest fact which is known about him is one which he himself would have described as 'a whimsical or characteristical' anecdote, and which he had told to Johnson:—'Boswell in the year 1745 was a fine boy, wore a white cockade, and prayed for King James, till one of his uncles, General Cochrane, gave him a shilling on condition that he would pray for King George, which he accordingly did. So you see that Whigs of all ages are made the same way.' It may have been these early signs of perversity that led his father to be strict in dealing with him, for we cannot doubt that Boswell in the *London Magazine* for 1781, is giving us a picture

of domestic life when he writes as follows :—‘ I knew a father who was a violent Whig, and used to upbraid his son with being deficient in “noble sentiments of liberty,” while at the same time he made this son live under his roof in such bondage, that he was not only afraid to stir from home without leave, but durst scarcely open his mouth in his father’s presence.’ For some time he was privately educated under the tuition of the Rev. John Dun, who was presented in 1752 to the living of Auchinleck by the judge, and finally at the High School and the University of Edinburgh. There he met with two friends with whom, to the close of his life, he was destined to have varied and close relations. One was Henry Dundas, first Lord Melville, and by “Harry the Ninth” Bozzy, in his ceaseless attempts to secure place and promotion, constantly attempted to steer, while that Pharos of Scotland, as Lord Cockburn calls him, was as constantly inclined to be diffident of the abilities, or at least the vagaries, of his suitor.

The other friend was William Johnson Temple, son of a Northumberland gentleman of good family, and grandfather of the present Archbishop of Canterbury. Temple was a little older than Boswell, who for upwards of thirty-seven years maintained an uninterrupted correspondence with him. As he is the Atticus of Boswell, we insert here a detailed account of him in order to avoid isolated references and allusions in the course of the narrative. On leaving Edinburgh he entered Trinity Hall, Cambridge; after taking the usual degrees, he was presented by Lord Lisburne to the living of Mamhead in Devon, which was followed by that of St Gluvias in Cornwall. Strangely enough for one who was an intimate friend of Boswell, he was no admirer of Johnson (whose name, by a curious coincidence, was a part of his own), and a strong Whig and water-drinker,

'a bill which,' says Bozzy humorously, 'was ever one which meets with a determined resistance and opposition in my lower house.' As the friend of Gray and of Mason, he must have been possessed of some share of ability, yet over his moral character the admirers and critics of Boswell are divided. To some he appears as the true and faithful Atticus to the Cicero of his friend, the Mentor and honest adviser in all times of danger and trial. To others he seems but to have possessed, in a minor degree, all the failings of Boswell himself, and it would appear the most natural inference to believe that, had Temple been endowed with greater force of mental or moral character, the results would have been seen in many ways upon the actions of his friend. In his wife he was unfortunate, and, at one time at least, he attempted to secure a colonial chaplaincy in order to effect a separation. He was the writer of an *Essay on the Clergy; their Studies and Recreations*, 1774; *Historical and Political Memoirs*, 1777; *Abuse of Unrestrained Power*, 1778; all of which have completely passed from the memory of man. But he lives with a fair claim to fame, as the correspondent of Boswell, who calls him 'best of friends' to 'a weak distemper'd soul that swells in sudden gusts, and sinks again in calms.' A chance memorandum by Temple, on the death of Gray, displaying considerable felicity of phrase and insight, was sent by Boswell to the *London Magazine* of March 1772, from which it was copied by Mason in his *Life of Gray*, and in an adapted form it was used by Johnson himself in his sketch of the poet's work, in his *Lives of the Poets*. The discovery of the *Letters to Temple* is one of the happiest accidents in literature, and without them the true life of Boswell could not be written. To neither Macaulay nor Carlyle were they

known for use in their famous reviews. On the death of Temple in 1796, one year after the decease of his friend, his papers passed into the possession of his son-in-law, who retired to France, where he died. Some fifty years ago, a gentleman making purchases in a shop at Boulogne, observed that the wrapper was a scrap of a letter, which formed part of a bundle bought shortly before from a travelling hawker. On investigation, the letters were found to be the correspondence of Boswell with Temple, and all doubts as to their genuineness were conclusively set at rest by their bearing the London and Devon post marks, and the franks of well known names. But the internal evidence alone, as we shall see, would be sufficient to establish their authenticity. Published in 1857 by Bentley, under the careful editorship of Mr Francis, they constitute, along with the no less happy discovery in 1854, behind an old press in Sydney, of Campbell's *Diary of a Visit to England*—though Professor Jowett was inclined to doubt the authenticity of the latter—the most valuable accession of evidence to the Johnsonian circle of interest, and they shed on Boswell and his method a light which otherwise would leave much in darkness, or, at least, but ensure a general acceptance of the harsher features in the criticism by Macaulay. From the remark by Boswell to Temple—‘remember and put my letters into a book neatly; see which of us does it first,’ it has been inferred that he meditated, in some sort of altered appearance, their republication. That Temple entertained the same idea on his part we know from his own words, and from the title under which Boswell suggested their issue—*Remarks on Various Authors, in a Series of Letters to James Boswell, Esq.* But that Boswell himself ever did intend the publication of his own must be pronounced, by all that know

what lies behind their printed form, a moral impossibility.

The first preserved letter is dated from Edinburgh, July 29, 1758. It reveals at once the historic Boswell, such as he remained to the close, the cheerful self-confidence, the gregarious instincts, the pleasing air of moralizing, and the easy flow of style. 'Some days ago I was introduced to your friend Mr Hume; he is a most discreet affable man as ever I met with, and has really a great deal of learning, a choice collection of books . . . we talk a good deal of genius, fine learning, improving our style, etc., but I am afraid solid learning is much worn out. Mr Hume is, I think, a very proper person for a young man to cultivate an acquaintance with.' Then he digresses to 'my passion for Miss W——t,' of whom, he assures his friend, he is 'excessively fond, so don't be surprised if your grave, sedate, philosophic friend who used to carry it so high, and talk with such a composed indifference of the beauteous sex, should all at once commence Don Quixote for his adorable Dulcinea.' We catch sight of him, at eighteen, going on the northern circuit with his father and Lord Hailes. There, by the advice of an Edinburgh acquaintance, Love, an old actor at Drury Lane, but then a teacher of elocution in the town, he began 'an exact journal,' and on that journey it was that Hailes made Boswell aware of the fact that was to henceforward colour the entire tide of his life, the existence of Dr Johnson as a great writer in London, 'which grew up in my fancy into a kind of mysterious veneration, by figuring to myself a state of solemn elevated abstraction, in which I supposed him to live in the immense metropolis of London.' Such were the links, the advice of this obscure player to keep a journal, and the report given

to the youth by the judge in their postchaise. As early as December 1758 we hear of his having 'published now and then the production of a leisure hour in the magazines,' and of his life in Edinburgh he writes, "from nine to ten I attend the law class; from ten to eleven study at home, and from one to two attend a class on Roman Antiquities; the afternoon and evening I always spend in study. I never walk except on Saturdays.' A full allowance, surely, all this for one who regrets his sad impotence in study, and writes the letters to Lord Hailes which we shall quote later.

Even at this period he betrays the fatal defect which remains with him through life, the indulgence in 'the luxury of noble sentiments,' and the easy and irritating Micawber-like genteel roll with which he turns off a moral platitude or finely vague sentiment, in the belief that good principles constitute good character. 'As our minds improve in knowledge,' he writes, 'may the sacred flame still increase until at last we reach the glorious world above when we shall never be separated, but enjoy an everlasting society of bliss. . . . I hope by Divine assistance, you shall still preserve your amiable character amidst all the deceitful blandishments of vice and folly.' While still at Edinburgh he produced *The Coquettes, or the Gallant in the Closet*, by Lady Houston, but it was ruined on the third night, and found to be merely a translation of one of the feeblest plays of Thomas Corneille. This play was long believed to be by Boswell, but his part was merely the providing the translator with a prologue, nor was the fact revealed till long after by the lady herself.

In November 1759 he entered the class of moral philosophy under Adam Smith at Glasgow. Perhaps his father had thought that in the more sedate capital

of the West, and in close propinquity to Auchinleck, there would be less scope for the long career of eccentricities upon which he was now to enter. If such, however, had been the intention, it was destined to a rude awakening. All his life Bozzy affected the company of players, among whom he professed to find 'an animation and a relish of existence,' and at this period he tells us he was flattered by being held forth as a patron of literature. In the course of his assiduous visits to the local theatre he met with an old stage-struck army officer from Ireland, Francis Gentleman, who had sold his commission to risk his chances on the boards. By this worthy an edition of Southern's *Oroonoko* was dedicated to Boswell, and in the epistle are found some of his qualities :—

' But when with honest pleasure she can find  
Sense, taste, religion, and good nature join'd,  
There gladly will she raise her feeble Voice  
Nor fear to tell that Boswell is her Choice.'

Thus early had the youthful patron of the drama blossomed into notoriety, and having also commenced attendance at the Roman Catholic Chapel he had now resolved to become a priest, though curiously enough he began this career by eloping, as we are assured by Ramsay of Ochtertyre, with a Roman Catholic actress. His father followed the pair to London, and there, it would seem, prevailed on the erratic neophyte to abandon his fair partner, whose existence would certainly have been a fatal barrier to the proposed priesthood. At least, like his friend Gibbon of later days, if he sighed as a lover, he obeyed as a son, and a compromise by which he was to enter on the profession of arms was effected. His father called on Archibald,

Duke of Argyll, an old campaigner with Marlborough. 'My Lord,' said the Duke, 'I like your son; this boy must not be shot at for three shillings and sixpence a day.' This scene reads like a pre-arranged affair calculated to flatter the erratic Bozzy out of his warlike schemes, for which it is clear he was never fitted. Indeed, the true aim was really, as he confesses to Temple, a wish to be 'about court, enjoying the happiness of the *beau monde* and the company of men of genius.' Temple had come forward with an offer of a thousand pounds to obtain a commission for him in the Guards, and Boswell assures us repeatedly, 'I had from earliest years a love for the military life.' Yet we can with equal difficulty figure 'our Bozzy' as priest or soldier. Like Hogg who hankered after the post of militia ensign with 'nerves not,' as Lockhart says, 'heroically strung,' Boswell in his own *Letter to the People of Scotland* confesses himself 'not blest with high heroic blood, but rather I think troubled with a natural timidity of personal danger, which it costs me some philosophy to overcome.' Nor was his devotion to charmer or chapel likely to weather the dissipated life he led in London. In later life he may have had thoughts of his own feelings when he proposed to publish, from the manuscript in his possession, the life of Sir Robert Sibbald. That antiquary had been pressed by the Duke of Perth to come over to the Papists, and for some time embraced the ancient religion, until the rigid fasting led him to reconsider the controversy and he returned to Protestantism. Bozzy thought the remark of his friend, that as ladies love to see themselves in a glass, so a man likes to see and review himself in his journal, 'a very pretty allusion,' and we may be sure, in spite of his reticence, that his own case was present at the time to his mind. His distressed father enlisted



the interest of Lord Hailes, who requested Dr Jortin, Prebendary of St Paul's, to take in hand the flighty youth, and to persuade him to renounce the errors of the Church of Rome for those of the Church of England, for it was plain that Boswell had broken loose from his old moorings, and some middle course might, it was hoped, prove to be possible. 'Your young gentleman,' writes Jortin to Hailes, 'called at my house. I was gone out for the day; he then left your letter and a note with it for me, promising to be with me on Saturday morning. But from that time to this I have heard nothing of him. He began, I suppose, to suspect some design upon him, and his new friends may have represented me to him as a heretic and an infidel, whom he ought to avoid as he would the plague.' More likely the Catholic fit had passed away. But what a light does this phase, erratic even among his countless vagaries, shed on his relation to Johnson! Never, we may rest assured, did he tell the sage of this hidden passage in his life; yet how often do we find him putting leading questions to his friend and Mentor on all points of Catholic doctrine and casuistry, purgatory, and the invocation of the saints, confession, and the mass! There can be no doubt that this wrench left a deep impress on the confused religious views of Boswell, and this is the clue which explains the opening conversation with Johnson at the beginning of their intimacy. 'I acknowledged,' he writes, 'that though educated strictly in the principles of religion, I had for some time been misled into a certain degree of infidelity; but I was now come to a better way of thinking, and was fully satisfied of the truth of the Christian revelation, though I was not clear as to every point considered to be orthodox.' Never in any way does he refer to this episode of his life, but the *Life of Johnson*

is, as we shall have occasion to show, the life in many ways also of its author, who says of himself that, 'from a certain peculiarly frank, open, and ostentatious disposition which he avows, his history, like that of the old Seigneur Michael de Montaigne, is to be traced in his writings.'

Left to himself and the guidance of the writer Derrick, 'my first tutor in the ways of London, who shewed me the town in all its variety of departments, both literary and sportive,' he was now busily spelling through the pages of the Gull's Hornbook. From this course of idle dissipation he was saved by the interposition of an Ayrshire neighbour of the family, the Earl of Eglintoun, though were we to credit the account of the waif himself the Earl 'insisted that young Boswell should have an apartment in his house.' Certain it is that by his lordship he was taken to Newmarket and introduced to the members of the Jockey Club. He would appear to have fancied himself a regularly elected member, for here his eccentricity broke forth into a yet more violent form. Calling for pen and paper, while the sporting fraternity gathered round, he produced the *Cub at Newmarket*, which he printed and dedicated to the Duke of York in a characteristically Boswellian strain. In doggerel which defies rhyme or reason he tells how his patron

' By chance a curious cub has got  
On Scotia's mountains newly caught ;'

and then—the first of his many portraits drawn by himself, and prophetic of the lover of hospitable boards and good cheer as we know him in his works—he describes the writer as

' Not of the iron race  
Which sometimes Caledonia grace ;

Though he to combat should advance,  
Plumpness shone in his countenance ;  
And belly prominent declared  
That he for beef and pudding cared ;  
He had a large and ponderous head,  
That seemed to be composed of lead ;  
From which hung down such stiff, lank hair,  
As might the crows in autumn scare.'

At this time it is likely took place the escapade with which he must have convulsed the gravity of the Edinburgh *litterati* invited to meet Johnson on their return from the Hebrides. 'I told, when Dr Hugh Blair was sitting with me in the pit of Drury Lane, in a wild freak of youthful extravagance I entertained the audience *prodigiously* by imitating the lowing of a cow. I was so successful in this boyish frolic that the universal cry of the galleries was "*encore the cow*." In the pride of my heart I attempted imitations of other animals, but with very inferior effect.' Blair's advice was, says Scott, 'Stick to the coo, man,' in his peculiar burr, but we can imagine how this unforeseen reminiscence must have confused the divine. After an ineffectual effort to enter himself at the Inner Temple, the 'cub' had to return in April 1761 to Edinburgh.

Old Edinburgh was nothing if not convivial. Writing to Temple and confessing that his London life had 'not been entirely as it ought to be,' he appeals to him for pity in his present surroundings. Imagine 'a young fellow,' he cries, 'whose happiness was always centred in London, hauled away to the town of Edinburgh, obliged to conform to every Scottish custom, or be laughed at—"Will ye hae some jeel? Oh fie, oh fie!"—his flighty imagination quite cramped, and be obliged to study *Corpus Juris Civilis* and live in his father's

strict family ; is there any wonder, sir, that the unlucky dog should be somewhat fretful? Yoke a Newmarket courser to a dung cart, and I'll lay my life on't he'll either caper or kick most confoundedly, or be as stupid and restive as an old battered post-horse.' Among the many clubs of the time Boswell instituted a jovial society called the *Soaping Club* which met weekly in a tavern. The motto of the members was 'Every man soap his own beard,' a rather recondite witticism which their founder declares equivalent to the reigning phrase of 'Every man in his humour.' It may be suggested here that in this company of feeble Bacchanalians Boswell had copied the Rabelaisian *fay ce que vous voudras* of the Franciscans of Medmenham Abbey with Sandwich, Wilkes, and others. At any rate, as their self-constituted laureate, he produced the following extraordinary song, which can be paralleled for inanity only by the stave he sang before Pitt in the Guildhall of London, as a means of attracting the notice of the Premier with a view to Parliament. The song is characteristically Boswellian.

' Boswell of Soapers the King

On Tuesdays at Tom's does appear,

And when he does talk or does sing,

To him ne'er a one can come near.

For he talks with such ease and such grace,

That all charm'd to attention we sit,

And he sings with so comic a face

That our sides are just ready to split.

Boswell is modest enough,

Himself not quite Phœbus he thinks,

He never does flourish with snuff,

And hock is the liquor he drinks.

And he owns that Ned Colquet the priest  
May to something of honour pretend,  
And he swears that he is not in jest,  
When he calls this same Colquet his friend.

Boswell is pleasant and gay,  
For frolic by nature design'd ;  
He heedlessly rattles away  
When the company is to his mind.  
"This maxim," he says, "you may see,  
We never can have corn without chaff ;"  
So not a bent sixpence cares he,  
Whether *with* him or *at* him you laugh.

Boswell does women adore,  
And never once means to deceive,  
He's in love with at least half a score ;  
If they're serious he smiles in his sleeve.  
He has all the bright fancy of youth,  
With the judgment of forty and five ;  
In short, to declare the plain truth,  
There is no better fellow alive.'

This, it must be confessed, is sad stuff even for a laureate of twenty, and is jesting with difficulty. Every man, says Johnson, has at one time or other of his life an ambition to set up for a wag, but that a man who had completed the *Life of Johnson* should in after years complacently refer to this character of himself and 'traits in it which time has not yet altered, that egotism and self-applause which he is still displaying, yet it would seem with a conscious smile,' is scarcely credible were it not out-distanced by graver weaknesses.

For about this date he published *An Elegy upon the Death of an Amiable Young Lady*, flanked by three puffing epistles from himself and his friends, Erskine and Dempster. In the same year appeared his *Ode to Tragedy*—by a Gentleman of Scotland, with a dedica-

tion to—James Boswell, Esq!—‘for your particular kindness to me, and chiefly for the profound respect with which you have always treated me.’ We hear of his ‘old hock’ humour, a favourite phrase with him for his Bacchanalian tastes, and we find the author limning himself as possessing

‘A soul by nature formed to feel  
Grief sharper than the tyrant’s steel,  
And bosom big with swelling thought  
From ancient lore’s remembrance brought.’

In 1760 had appeared a *Collection of Original Poems*, published by Donaldson in Edinburgh on the model of Dodsley’s *Miscellanies*. It comprised poems by Blacklock, Beattie, and others, and a second volume was issued by Erskine as editor in 1762. To it Boswell contributed nearly thirty pieces along with Home, the author of *Douglas*, Macpherson of *Ossian* fame or notoriety, John MacLaurin and others. The merits of the volume are beneath notice, and Boswell’s contributions of Odes, Epigrams, Letters, Epistles, are of the traditional character; but *An Epistle from a London Buck to his Friend* must have been read by his father with regret, and by his mother of ‘almost unexampled piety and goodness’ with shame. There is only one poem that calls for attention, the *Evening Walk in the Abbey Church of Holyrood House*, the original, perhaps, of Fergusson’s lament on the state of neglect of the then deserted mansion of royalty, where

‘the thistle springs  
In domicile of ancient Kings,  
Without a patriot to regret  
Our palace and our ancient state.’

A third volume was announced for publication ‘about

eighteen months hence,' but the public had enough of this coagulated jargon as Carlyle would have styled it, and critics and readers are spared the task of its consideration.

Yet all this time he was in the enjoyment of the best company that Edinburgh could afford; he was admitted a member of the Select Society, and his circle embraced such men as Lord Somerville, Lord Hailes, Dr Blair, Kames, Robertson, Hume, Home, Jupiter Carlyle and others. 'Lord Auchinleck,' he quaintly adds, 'took the trouble himself to give him a regular course of instruction in law, a circumstance of singular benefit, and of which Mr Boswell has ever expressed a strong and grateful sense.' But his sense was not such as to restrain him from a mock-heroic correspondence with Andrew Erskine, brother of the Earl of Kellie. Erskine must have been possessed of some parts, for he was the correspondent of Burns and was intimate with George Thomson the composer, yet we can fancy the consternation of the old judge when this farrago of the new humour was published in London in 1763. Writing from his father's house, he thus begins:—'Dear Erskine, no ceremony I beseech you! Give me your hand. How is my honest Captain Andrew? How goes it with the elegant Lady A——? the lovely, sighing Lady J——? and how, oh how, does that glorious luminary Lady B——do? you see I retain my usual volatility. The Boswells, you know, came over from Normandy with William the Conqueror; and some of us possess the spirit of our ancestors, the French. I do, for one. A pleasant spirit it is. *Vive la bagatelle* is the maxim. A light heart may bid defiance to fortune.' Again the old man would find 'Allow me a few more words. I live here in a remote corner of an old ruinous house, where my ancestors have been very

jovial. What a solemn idea rushes on my mind! They are all gone: I must follow. Well, and what then? Let me shift about to another subject. The best I can think of is a sound sleep; so good-night.' In fact, like Sir Fretful Plagiary in the *Critic*, Bozzy was so covetous of popularity that he would rather be abused than be not mentioned at all. Little augury, too, of success at the bar could his father find in the following portrait of his son: 'the author of the *Ode to Tragedy* is a most excellent man; he is of an ancient family in the west of Scotland, upon which he values himself not a little. At his nativity there appeared omens of his future greatness; his parts are bright, and his education has been good; he has travelled in post-chaises miles without number; he is fond of seeing much of the world; he eats of every good dish, especially apple pie; he drinks old hock; he has a very fine temper; he is somewhat of a humourist, and a little tinctured with pride; he has a good, manly countenance, and he owns himself to be amorous; he has infinite vivacity; yet is at times observed to have a melancholy cast.'

Nothing but the most obtuse vanity could ever have induced Bozzy to publish all this. 'Curiosity,' he declares in the preface, 'is the most prevalent of all our passions, and the curiosity for reading letters is the most prevalent of all kinds of curiosity. Had any man in the three kingdoms found the following letters directed, sealed, and addressed, with post-marks—provided he could have done so honestly—he would have read every one of them.' There is the true Boswell in this characteristic confession, the Boswell that read in the private diaries of Johnson, and, with an eye to biographical materials, had admitted an impulse to carry them off, and never see him more. 'Why, sir,' said the doctor, 'I do not think you could have helped it.'



After this it was no wonder that his father was induced to allow his return to London, 'Where a man may soap his own beard, and enjoy whatever is to be had in this transitory state of things, and every agreeable whim may be indulged without censure.' The Duke of Queensberry, the patron of Gay, was one of those to whom he was recommended now that he inclined to 'persist in his fondness for the Guards, or rather, in truth, for the metropolis,' but he suspected some arrangement between his father and the Duke by which the commission was delayed. For some months he spent a random life as the occupier of Temple's chambers in the vicinity of Johnson. Little could be expected of the friend of Churchill and Wilkes, yet Boswell now was at the turning point of his career.

'This is to me,' he writes in his great work, 'a memorable year; for in it I had the happiness to obtain the acquaintance of that extraordinary man whose memoirs I am now writing; an acquaintance which I shall ever esteem as one of the most fortunate circumstances of my life.' We have seen how Lord Hailes, had on the 1758 circuit, mentioned to him the name of Johnson; how in Glasgow Gentleman had given him a representation of 'dictionary Johnson; ' how Derrick in 1760, during his first visit to London, had promised to introduce this youth of twenty to the great dictator of literature; and Sheridan, the father of the dramatist, when in Edinburgh in 1761, giving public lectures on elocution, had made a similar promise. But on his return to London at the end of 1762, Boswell had found that Sheridan had quarrelled with Johnson, and Derrick had retired to Bath as master of the ceremonies in succession to Beau Nash. Luckily Derrick had before introduced his friend to Davies, the bookseller in Covent Garden, who as 'one of the best imitators of

Johnson's voice and manner' only increased the ardour of Boswell for the meeting. Now the hour was come and the man. Yet surely never could there have been a more apparently unpropitious time chosen. Number 45 of the *North Briton* denouncing Bute and his Scotch favourites had appeared on April 23rd. The minister had bowed to the storm and resigned, while the writer of the libel had been arrested under a general warrant and discharged on the 30th of the month under appeal, either to be hanged, thought Adam Smith, or to get Bute impeached in six months. Alexander Cruden, of *Concordance* fame, was rambling over London in his lucid interval like an inverted Old Mortality, busy with a sponge obliterating every hated '45' scrawled over the walls and every conceivable spot in the city against his country. Yet at such an hour it was that the famous meeting of Johnson and his biographer took place.

'At last, on Monday the 16th of May, when I was sitting in Mr Davies' back-parlour, after having drunk tea with him and Mrs Davies, Johnson unexpectedly came into the shop; and Mr Davies having perceived him through the glass door in the room in which we were sitting, advancing towards us,—he announced his awful approach to me, somewhat in the manner of an actor in the part of Horatio, when he addresses Hamlet on the appearance of his father's ghost, "Look, my lord, it comes." I found that I had a very perfect idea of Johnson's figure, from the portrait of him painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds. . . . Mr Davies mentioned my name, and respectfully introduced me to him. I was much agitated; and recollecting his prejudice against the Scotch, of which I had heard much, I said to Davies, "Don't tell where I come from."—"From Scotland," cried Davies roguishly. "Mr Johnson," said I, "I do

indeed come from Scotland, but I cannot help it." . . . "That, sir, I find is what a very great many of your countrymen cannot help." This stroke stunned me a good deal; and when we had sat down, I felt myself not a little embarrassed, and apprehensive of what might come next. . . . Eager to take any opening to get into conversation with him, I ventured to say, "Oh, sir, I cannot think Mr Garrick would grudge such a trifle to you." "Sir," said he, with a stern look, "I have known David Garrick longer than you have done, and I know no right you have to talk to me on the subject." Perhaps I deserved this check,' etc., etc.

Next day Boswell called on Davies, who assured him that the doctor would not take it amiss if he were to visit him; and so, a week later, 'after being entertained by the witty sallies of Messieurs Thornton, Wilkes, Churchill and Lloyd,' from whom he would hear plenty of vigorous abuse of his country, and whose names we may take it as certain were not mentioned to his new friend, Boswell boldly repaired to Johnson. Nothing is more striking than the contrast between the hitherto reckless Bozzy and the easy assurance and composure with which he faces Johnson, sits up with the sage, sups at the Mitre, leads the conversation, and apparently holds his own in the discussions. Doubtless, the 'facility of manners' which Adam Smith has said was a feature of the man, was here of service to him, and no less so would have been the flattering way in which he managed to inform Johnson of his reputation over the Border. Boswell was not slow to write to Lord Hailes, knowing full well how the report of such an acquaintance and friendship would be welcome at Auchinleck as the signs of an approaching reformation. Goldsmith, whom he met shortly after, he entertained at the Mitre with a party of friends,

among whom was the Rev. Dr John Ogilvie, the author of some portentous and completely forgotten epics, but who is not yet quite lost to sight as the writer of the sixty-second paraphrase of Scripture, 'Lo! in the last of days behold.' A subsequent 'evening by ourselves' he describes to Lord Hailes in the wariest manner, so as to secure his father's consent to a plan of travel. The old judge had wished his son to follow the profession of law which had now in their family become quite hereditary, and had coupled this with a scheme of study at Utrecht, after the plan he had himself followed at Leyden. A compromise had, in fact, been arranged by which this was to be pursued, and the career of arms dropped. Nothing can be more adroit than the way in which the young hopeful about to embark on the grand tour manages in his despatch to his lordship, with an eye to the Home Office, to suggest the furtherance of his own ideas under the supposed guise of Johnson's approval. 'He advises me to combat idleness as a distemper, to read five hours every day, but to let inclination direct me what to read. He is a great enemy to a stated plan of study. He advises me when abroad to go to places where there is most to be seen and learned. He is not very fond of the notion of spending a whole winter in a Dutch town. He thinks I may do much more by private study than by attending lectures. He would have me to perambulate (a word in his own style) Spain, also to visit the northern kingdoms, where more that is new is to be seen than in France or Italy, but he is not against me seeing these warmer regions.'

Here, in fact, is the germ of the tour to the Baltic they had hoped when at Dunvegan one day to carry out, for which Johnson, when in his sixty-eighth year was still ready, and which Boswell thought would have

made them acquainted with the King of Sweden, and the Empress of Russia. On a later day of the month he asked his friend to the Mitre to meet his uncle Dr John, 'an elegant scholar and a physician bred in the School of Boerhaave,' and George Dempster, M.P. for the Forfar Burghs. As the latter was infected with the sceptical views of Hume, there would seem to have been a scene, for in the *Life* Johnson is made to say, 'I have not met with any man for a long time who has given me such general displeasure,' but Boswell, ever with an eye for copy, writes to Temple, 'it was a very fertile evening, and my journal is stored with its fruits.' Then to Lord Hailes he writes: '*Entre nous* of Dempster,—Johnson had seen a pupil of Hume and Rousseau totally unsettled as to principles. I had infinite satisfaction in hearing solid truth confuting vain subtilty. I thank God that I have got acquainted with Mr Johnson. He has done me infinite service. He has assisted me to obtain peace of mind; he has assisted me to become a rational Christian; I hope I shall ever remain so.' Pleasantly all this would sound at home. There would be less now heard of his father's threat in May to disinherit him, and of the son's appeal to Lord Hailes to intercede with him—'to have patience with me for a year or two, and I may be what he pleases.' On July 15th he has had a long letter from his father, full of affection and good counsel. 'Honest man,' he writes to Temple, 'he is now happy. He insists on having my solemn promise. The only question is, how much I am to promise.' Then on the 25th he has his letters of credit and his introductions to people in Holland. 'They have been sent open for me to seal, so I have been amused to see the different modes of treating that favourite subject *myself*.' He is to be allowed £240 a year, but he is determined not to be

straitened, nor to encourage the least narrowness, but to draw on his father when necessary. Wilkes had gone to France, but had let him have some franks 'to astonish a few North Britons.' Parting for a time with Temple, whose family was now in straitened circumstances, he assures him that their friendship should be 'an exalted comfort' to him in his distress, and concludes characteristically enough with advice to Temple's younger brother in the army for his establishment in 'solid notions of religion and morality.'

Before he bids his native land good-night, there is a final letter to Hailes with his father, Jortin, and the actress all well in his mind's eye. 'My scepticism,' he says, 'was not owing to thinking wrong, but to not thinking at all. It is a matter of great moment to keep a sense of religion constantly impressed upon our minds. If that divine guest does not occupy part of the space, vain intruders will,'—the fine old roll of Micawber to the close. Johnson on the 5th August started with him for Harwich in the stage coach, half in hopes of visiting Holland in the summer, and accompanying Bozzy in a tour through the Netherlands. 'I must see thee out of England,' said the old man kindly. On the beach they parted, and 'as the vessel put out to sea, I kept my eyes upon him for a considerable time, while he remained rolling his majestic frame in his usual manner; and at last I perceived him walk back into the town and he disappeared.' Boswell's attendance upon his new friend had not escaped the notice of the doctor's circle. 'Who,' asked one, 'is this Scotch cur at Johnson's heels?' 'Not a cur, but a bur,' was Goldsmith's reply, 'and he has the faculty of sticking.' With what effect the world was to know.

## CHAPTER II

### THE CONTINENT—CORSICA. 1763-66

‘That’s from Paoli of Corsica.’—GOLDSMITH, ‘*The Good Natured Man.*’

‘UTRECHT,’ writes Boswell, ‘seeming at first very dull to me after the animated scenes of London, my spirits were grievously affected.’ But the depression was not destined to last, and soon we hear of his having wearied of the proposed two years’ course of study. The custom of legal training in some of the universities of the Continent was about this time coming to a close, though for long it had remained usual, at least with the landed classes of Scotland, to secure such an extended field of study for the bar by an attendance at some of the more developed schools of jurisprudence in Holland. Cunningham, the celebrated critic of Bentley, had given prelections in Leyden, and no reader of the *Heart of Midlothian* will forget the laments of the inimitable Bartoline Saddletree over his not being sent to Leyden or Utrecht to study the Institutes and the Pandects. Since the days of Gilbert Jack at Leyden, the connection between Holland and the Scottish universities had been close, and the garrets of Amsterdam had been crowded before the Revolution by refugees from both Scotland and England who maintained, upon their return, the ties they had contracted

in their exile. Even Fielding had been sent to Leyden for law, and just before the visit of Boswell, to which his father had consented rather as a compromise than from any practical benefit that might ensue, the law of Scotland, largely based on Roman and feudal precedents, had received fresh extensions of conveyancing and other branches of jurisprudence, through the mass of forfeited estates brought into the market after the suppression of the Jacobite Rebellions. What country, then, could so rapidly afford such a course of legal study as the Protestant and commercial Holland? The reputation of Boerhaave had drawn medical students from all quarters, and Boswell's uncle John, and the celebrated Monro *primus* of the Edinburgh Medical School had been among the number. Goldsmith in 1755 met Irish medical students there, and some twenty years before the time we have reached Carlyle of Inveresk had found in Leyden 'an established lodging-house' where his countrymen, Gregory and Dickson were domiciled, and numerous others, among whom he expressly mentions Charles Townshend, Askew the Greek scholar, Johnston of Westerhall, Doddeswell, afterwards Chancellor of the Exchequer, and John Wilkes then entering, at eighteen, on the career of profligacy that was to render him notorious. Carlyle describes their meetings at each other's rooms twice or thrice a week, when they drank coffee, supped on Dutch red herrings, eggs and salad, and never sat beyond the decent hour of twelve. For such a style of living Boswell's annual allowance of £240 was certainly handsome in a place where the fuel, chiefly peat, was the only expensive item.

But such a quiet style of life was not congenial to the lively tastes of our traveller. He soon tired of the civil law lectures of Professor Trotz, and longed for



fresh woods and pastures new. He sighed to be upon his travels again. Of his life abroad some isolated notes may be gathered from the *Boswelliana*, and, as has been mentioned, he sought out his relatives at the Hague 'of the first fashion,' the Sommelsdycks, and with his facility of manners, and his father's credentials to the *literati* and scholars of the place, his circle of acquaintance was large and influential. We hear of an intimacy with the Rev. William Brown, minister of the Scottish congregation at Utrecht, the father of Principal Laurence Brown of Marischal College, Aberdeen; and with Sir Joseph Yorke, whom he met later in Ireland, then the Ambassador at the Hague, he would appear to have been acquainted. But Sir Joseph does not seem to have welcomed the easy manners of his young friend, and the dull life of the burgomasters was little suited to Boswell who ridicules their portly figures and their clothes which they wore as if they had been 'luggage.'

The two years' course of study was abruptly reduced to one. At its close we trace him at Berlin in July 1764, and in close relations with the British Envoy at the Prussian Court. Fortunately for Boswell this was both a countryman and a friend of his father's, Sir Andrew Mitchell, the late M.P. for the Banff Burghs. By the Ambassador he was introduced to the best society in the capital, and from Berlin he wrote to his father representing the urgent necessity of extending his travels, and, till the letter in reply should arrive, he proceeded into Hanover and Brunswick. On his return to Berlin towards the end of August he found a letter waiting him from Lord Auchinleck, who was naturally chagrined at the breakdown of his scheme of compromise. A visit to Paris he was prepared to allow, but the return of the wanderer to Utrecht was peremptorily commanded. The family of the Envoy was now at Spa,

but next day Boswell wrote him a letter urging him to intercede with his father for the proposed extension. The letter is a very long one, and its abridgement even is impossible here, but few more Boswellian productions can be found. He has, he tells Sir Andrew, a melancholy disposition, and to escape from the gloom of dark speculation he has made excursions into the fields of folly, and in this tone of the Preacher in *Ecclesiastes* he rambles on. The words of St Paul, 'I must see Rome,' he finds are borne in upon him, and such a journey would afford him the talk for a lifetime, the more so that he was no libertine and disclaimed all intentions of travelling as *Milord Anglois*, but simply as the scholar and the man of elegant curiosity. Did not Sir Andrew as the loved and respected friend of his father think that the son had a claim to protest before he considered any act regarding himself as passed, and would not the Envoy remonstrate or persuade the father as to the justice of his wish? No reply was sent to this, but the judge, thinking that discretion was the wiser part in circumstances where it was useless to dictate without the means to enforce compliance, yielded reluctant consent to the scheme of an Italian tour. Gravely then does Boszy rebuke Sir Andrew and for this occasion he forgives him, 'for I just say the same to young people when I advise. Believe me,' he somewhat irrelevantly adds, 'I have a soul.'

Fortune followed him wherever he turned. George, tenth Earl Marischal, and brother of Frederick the Great's general, Marshal Keith, had joined the Earl of Mar in the rising of 1715, and had made an ineffectual descent in 1719 on Glenshiel with the Spaniards. But in the '45 he had taken no part, and he revealed to the British Government the existence of the Bourbon Family Compact. In return, his attainder had been removed

by George II., and on his brief visit to Scotland he had lived with Boswell's father in Ayrshire, perhaps as a friend of the Commissioners for the forfeited estates, when the occasion had been seized by Macpherson for an ode, 'attempted after the manner of Pindar,' in the fustian style of the translator of Ossian. With him or by his credentials Boswell went the round of the German courts, passing by Mannheim and Geneva, reaching the latter towards the end of December. The reader is struck with the airy assurance and self-possession which the laureate of the Soapers and the Newmarket Cub manifests on the grand tour, conducting himself at three and twenty with complete success at the courts of German princes, conversing with plenipotentiaries and dignitaries of all sorts in French and Italian, for German had not yet risen into sufficient historical or diplomatic importance to add to the linguistic burdens of mankind. Lord Marischal as the governor of Neufchatel had acted as the protector of Rousseau, and so was able to furnish his companion with a letter of introduction, hinting at his enthusiastic nature and describing him to the philosopher as a visionary hypochondriac. Voltaire he interviewed at Ferney, and he managed to please the great man by repeating—a characteristic trait of Bozzy, who believed such tale-bearing to be vastly conducive to the practice of benevolence—Johnson's criticism upon Frederick the Great's writings, 'such as you may suppose Voltaire's foot-boy to do, who has been his amanuensis.' He broached the subject of the philosophy of the unconscious, and was eager to know how ideas forgotten at the time were yet later on recollected. The other replied by a quotation from Thomson's *Winter* with the writer's question, as to the winds,

'In what far distant region of the sky  
Hushed in silence sleep ye when 'tis calm?'

The attempt to draw out Voltaire upon the tour to the Hebrides, which Boswell and Johnson had been vaguely talking over, produced only the rather sarcastic query if he wished him to accompany them, with a look 'as if I had talked of going to the North Pole.' Of his visit to the wild philosopher, as he styles Rousseau, we have no notice, beyond the general remark that they had agreed to differ alike in politics and religion, but that there were points *où nos âmes sont unies*. The feudal dogmas of Boswell and his rigid adherence to his pet idea of 'the grand scheme of subordination' were of course not likely to be pleasing to the sceptical *aqua fortis* of the sombre Genevese, with his belief in the fraternity of mankind and the greatness of the untutored Indian.

Boswell crossed the Alps, and either then or upon his homeward journey visited Bologna, Venice, and Mantua. He passed through Rome and, unknown to either, may have met Gibbon in the Eternal City into whose mind, some weeks before, 'as I sat musing among the ruins of the Capitol while the bare-footed friars were singing vespers in the Temple of Jupiter,' had started the idea of writing the *Decline and Fall*. In the city he met Andrew Lumsden, the Secretary of Prince Charles Edward, but we are not informed if the young Jacobite of five, who had prayed for the exiled family now sought any opportunity of making himself known to the object of his devotion. Naples brought him into the more congenial society of Wilkes with whom, he says, he 'enjoyed many classical scenes with peculiar relish.' When Churchill had died at Boulogne in the arms of Wilkes, the latter had retired to Naples to inscribe his sorrow 'in the close style of the ancients' upon an urn of alabaster which had been the gift of Winckelmann, and in that city now he was, as the literary executor, preparing annotations on the works of

Churchill. Boswell managed with his curious want of tact in such matters, fitting the man who could suggest cards to a dying friend with an uneasy conscience, to hint that the poet had 'bounced into the regions below,' and to render the *Il Bruto Inglese*, by which the papers of the land referred to Wilkes and liberty, by a version significant of the notorious ugliness of his gay acquaintance. Naples, as with Milton, was the limit of his tour, and from it he returned to Rome. He reached that city in April 1765, and dispatched a letter to Rousseau, then 'living in romantick retirement' in Switzerland, requesting his promised introduction to the Corsican general, 'which if he refused, I should certainly go without it, and probably be hanged as a spy.' The wild philosopher was as good as his word, and the letter met the traveller at Florence. 'The charms of sweet Siena detained me no longer than they should have done, I required the hardy air of Corsica to brace me, after the delights of Tuscany,' an enigmatical turn of expression upon which light is thrown later, when we discuss the love affairs of Boswell, by a reference to a dark-eyed 'signora' on whom the tender traveller had glanced. At Leghorn he was within one day's sail of Corsica.

Pascal Paoli was the Garibaldi of his day. When his father in 1738 had been driven from the island by the French, he had retired with him to Naples where he entered a military college and followed the profession of arms. The way was paved for his return by the disturbances in the island in 1755, and so successful was he in his guerilla warfare as general against the Genoese, the owners of Corsica, that they were speedily driven to sue for peace. It was in a sort of lull in the storm of hostilities that our traveller made his unexpected appearance, and the adroit way in which he managed to

lay his plans of action and to carry them out with such complete success calls for our admiration. In his *Tour* he simply says that 'having resolved to pass some years abroad (this is excellent, after his letter to Sir Andrew) for my instruction and entertainment, I conceived a design of visiting the Island of Corsica. I wished for something more than just the common course of what is called the tour of Europe, and Corsica occurred to me as a place where nobody else had been.' It may have been suggested to him by Rousseau, who had been engaged in some vague scheme of philandering philanthropy by which the wild philosopher was to play the Solon and the Lycurgus of the distressed islanders, and establish a fresh code of laws upon the basis of his new fraternity, but with which 'this steady patriot of the world alone,' as Canning styles him, 'the friend of every country but his own,' managed to mix in a much more practical way some not very honourable, if characteristic, intrigues for the surrender of the island to France.

Bozzy, at all events, was determined to make a bold bid for fame. Nothing like this had occurred, as an opening, during all his tour. The dangers of the plan were fully known to him, and the possibility was laid before his eyes of capture at the hands of the Barbary corsairs and a term of imprisonment at Algiers. Our adventurer waited on the commodore in command of the British squadron in the bay of Leghorn, and he was provided with a passport, the value of which against the threatened dangers does not sufficiently appear. Before he left Leghorn, his proposed visit had come to be regarded in a very serious light by Italian politicians. They saw in him an envoy from the British intrusted with powers to negotiate a treaty with Corsica, and all disclaimers of any such intention

were politely treated as an evasion. Bozzy was in consequence viewed as 'a very close young man,' a trait that at no time of his life was ever applicable to James Boswell, on whom, indeed, the advice given by Sir Henry Wotton to Milton would have been thrown away. Putting out to sea in a Tuscan vessel bound for Capo Corso for wine, he had two days to spend on board in consequence of a dead calm. 'At sunset,' he says, 'all the people in the ship sang *Ave Maria* with great devotion and some melody.' One recalls the similar circumstances under which Cardinal Newman found himself becalmed on the orange-boat in the Straits of Bonifacio. For some hours he had put himself in spirits by taking a hand at the oar, and at seven in the evening of the second day they landed in the harbour of Centuri. He delivered his credentials, and on Sunday heard a Corsican sermon, where the preacher told of Catharine of Siena who wished to be laid in the mouth of the awful pit, that she might stop it up, and so prevent the falling in of more souls. 'I confess, my brethren,' cried the friar, 'I have not such zeal, but I do what I can, I warn you how to avoid it.'

At Corte, the capital of the island, he waited boldly upon the Supreme Council. He was gravely received, as befitted a supposed British envoy, and lodged in the apartment of Paoli in a Franciscan convent. Next day, the old petitioner for a commission in the Guards found the first and last military experience of his life. Three French deserters waited on him in the belief that he came to recruit soldiers for Scotland, and 'begged to have the honour of going along with me.' Nor was the idea so absurd as he seems to have viewed it, for from the *Scots Magazine* of a somewhat later date we learn that British Volunteers and Highlanders

disbanded after the wars had been enlisted in the service of Paoli. But it is not improbable that the deserters had heard of Boswell's nationality from the woman of Penrith whom he found in the island, married to a French soldier in the army of the Pretender, whose fortunes she had followed when they had passed through Carlisle on the retreat from Derby. Another feature of Boswell, one whose consideration and explanation we shall attempt later on, now for the first time meets us, his inveterate love for interviewing criminals, and accordingly, 'as I wished to see all things in Corsica,' he had a meeting with the hangman who seemed sensible of his situation. The inhabitants crowded round him at a village as he advanced, and questioned the traveller, as Coleridge at Valetta found himself similarly interrogated, as to his professing himself a Christian when he did not believe in the Pope—*e perche*, and why? The old candidate for the priesthood managed to deftly evade this query by an assurance that in Britain the people were too far off and in a theological climate of their own. He was in the highest humour, and in this unusual flow of spirits he harangued the men of Bastelica with great fluency, getting, however, at Sollacaro somewhat nervous as the interview with the Corsican leader drew nigh. Paoli lived in constant dread of assassination, and the sudden arrival of this mysterious stranger was strongly calculated to arouse suspicions. For ten minutes, in silence, he looked at Boswell, who broke in with the remark that he was a gentleman from Scotland upon his travels and had lately visited Rome from which, having seen the ruins of one brave people, he was now come to view the rise of another. The general was not quite set at ease by this sententiously balanced sentence, and years after he



told Miss Burney about his impressions at the time of the mysterious stranger. It shews the ruling passion strong in life, and that Boswell, as 'the chiel' among them takin' notes,' forgot the rules of ordinary courtesy and prudence in the gratification of his darling method. 'He came to my country sudden,' said Paoli in his broken English, 'and he fetched me some letters of recommending him. And I supposed, in my *mente* he was in the privacy one espy; for I look away from him to my other companies, and when I look back to him I behold it in his hands his tablet, and one pencil. O, he was at the work, I give it you my honour, of writing down all what I say to some persons whatsoever in the room. I was angry enough, pretty much so. But soon I found out I was myself the monster he came to observe. O, he is a very good man Mr Boswell at the bottom, so witty, cheerful, so talkable. But at the first, Oh I was indeed *fache* of the sufficient.' This first glimpse of Bozzy at work is delightful. He was in fact "making himself," all unknown the while, as Shortreed said of Scott over the Liddesdale raids.

He dined with the general and suite. In spite of, perhaps by very reason of, his protestations of having no diplomatic mission, the highest attention was shewn him as an accredited envoy from St James'. In the morning chocolate was served up to him on a silver salver with the national arms; he rode out on the general's horse, with guards marching before him. Paoli knew sufficient English to maintain the dialogue, having picked up some slight knowledge of the tongue from Irish refugee officers in the Neapolitan service. His library was turned over by his inquisitive guest, who found among the books some odd volumes of *The Spectator* and *The Tatler*, Pope's *Essay on Man*, *Gulliver's Travels*, and Barclay's *Apology for the*

*Quakers*. His good humour, as it had won on the general, endeared the supposed *ambasciadore Inglese* to the peasants, and he had a Corsican dress made for him. Of that dress—‘in which I walked about with an air of true satisfaction’—every one who has heard of James Boswell has read, and it is inseparable somehow from our conceptions of the man and writer.

We select from this Corsican Tour—the least known to the general reader of Boswell’s three great works—what seems to us the gem of the book:—‘One day they must needs hear me play upon my German flute. To have told my honest natural visitants, ‘Really, gentlemen, I play very ill,’ and put on such airs as we do in our genteel companies, would have been highly ridiculous. I therefore immediately complied with their request. I gave them one or two Italian airs, and then some of our beautiful old Scots tunes, *Gilderoy, The Lass o’ Patie’s Mill, Corn Riggs are Bonny*.’ The pathetick simplicity and pastoral gaiety of the Scots musick will always please those who have the genuine feelings of nature. The Corsicans were charmed with the specimens I gave them, though I may now say that they were very indifferently performed. My good friends insisted also to have an English song from me. I endeavoured to please them in this, too. I sung them ‘Hearts of Oak are our Ships, Hearts of Oak are our Men.’ I translated it into Italian for them, and never did I see men so delighted as the Corsicans were. ‘*Cuore di querco*,’ cried they, ‘*bravo Inglese!*’ It was quite a joyous riot. I fancied myself to be a recruiting sea officer. I fancied all my chorus of Corsicans aboard the British fleet.’

How admirable is the style of all this, equal quite to Goldsmith’s best and lightest touch! Exquisite, too, is

that picture of Bozzy, as the rollicking British stage-tar of tradition, in his rendering of Garrick's song, the gems from the Opera and the national melodies. Allan Ramsay's song in Corsica is to be equalled only by Goldsmith on *his* tour when he played, but not for amusement, *Barbara Allan* and *Johnny Armstrong's Good Night* before the doors of Italian convents and Flemish homesteads.

But the highstrung Bozzy had to experience a revolution of low feelings to which he was ever prone. He is soon in a sort of Byronic fit, and he continues in a strain with which we should have not credited the 'gay classic friend of Jack Wilkes' and of that Sienese *signora*, unless he had turned evidence against himself. He declared his feelings to Paoli, as he had done to Johnson, whose curt advice had been not to confuse or resolve the common consequences of irregularity into an unalterable decree of destiny. To the general he now attributed his feeling of the vanity of life, the exhaustion in the very heat of youth of all the sweets of being, and the incapacity for taking part in active life to his 'metaphysical researches,' his reasoning beyond his depth on such subjects as it is not given to man to know. These hesitations the other wisely pushed aside with the soldierly advice to strengthen his mind by the perusal of Livy and Plutarch. In return Bozzy gave an imitation of 'my revered friend Mr Samuel Johnson,' little dreaming that all three would one day be intimate in London, and the general's house in Portman Square be always at the traveller's disposal. From the palace, as he styles it, of Paoli, Nov. 1765 he wrote to Johnson, as he had done before, 'from a kind of superstition agreeable to him as to myself,' from what he calls *loca solennia*—places of solemn interest. 'I dare to call this a spirited tour. I dare to challenge your approbation;' and,

reading it twenty years later in the original which the old man had preserved, he found it full of 'generous enthusiasm.' No account of the continental travels of Boswell would be complete without the reproduction of his letter to the doctor from Wittenberg. It is one of the most important for the more subtle shades of psychology in the writer's character.

*'Sunday, Sept. 30, 1764.'*

MY EVER DEAR AND MUCH RESPECTED SIR,—You know my solemn enthusiasm of mind. You love me for it, and I respect myself for it, because in so far I resemble Mr Johnson. You will be agreeably surprized when you learn the reason of my writing this letter. I am at Wittenberg in Saxony. I am in the old church where the Reformation was first preached, and where some of the Reformers lie interred. I cannot resist the serious pleasure of writing to Mr Johnson from the tomb of Melancthon. My paper rests upon the gravestone of that great and good man who was undoubtedly the best of all the Reformers. . . . At this tomb, then, my ever dear and respected friend! I vow to thee an eternal attachment. It shall be my study to do what I can to render your life happy: and if you die before me, I shall endeavour to do honour to your memory and, elevated by the remembrance of you, persist in noble piety. May God, the father of all beings, ever bless you! and may you continue to love your most affectionate friend, and devoted servant,—JAMES BOSWELL.'

So early had Boswell made his resolve to be the biographer of Johnson. On the very day of his introduction to him, he had taken notes of all that had passed in Davies' back-parlour. He was none of the men that do things by halves, and blunder into

a kind of success, as some of his depreciators have thought.

Six weeks he had been in Corsica. The first day of December saw him land at Genoa on his return, Lyons was reached on the third day of the new year, Paris one week later. Here Rousseau who had preceded him to London had provided him with a curious commission, the bringing over into England of his mistress Therese Levasseur. The easy-going Hume thus announces the fact to his friend the Countess de Boufflers. 'Mademoiselle sets out with a friend of mine, a young gentleman, very good humoured, very agreeable, and very mad. He has such a rage for literature that I dread some event fatal to my friend's honour. For remember the story of Terentia who was first married to Cicero, then to Sallust, and at last in her old age married a young nobleman, who imagined that she must possess some secret which would convey to him eloquence and genius.' A letter he found waiting from Johnson, together with one announcing the death of his mother. No more was heard about a second year at Utrecht. He crossed to London, and was again with his old friend, who had moved from the Temple to a good house in Johnson's Court, in Fleet Street. Goldsmith was no longer the obscure writer whom he had left behind, but the author of the *Vicar of Wakefield* and the *Traveller*. The club had been founded. He was encouraged by the sage to publish his account of his travels in Corsica—'you cannot go to the bottom, but all that you tell us will be new.'

He dined at the Mitre as of old, and presented Temple to Johnson. No word about his companion across the Channel, naturally enough, reached the old man's ears, but he mentioned Rousseau; though he

recognised he was now in a new moral atmosphere where every attempt was resented to 'unhinge or weaken good principles.' On a modified defence of the philosopher, whose works he professed had afforded him edification, he did venture, but thinking it enough to defend one at a time Boswell said nothing 'of my gay friend Wilkes.' In the Paris *salons* of that winter Wilkes, Sterne, Foote, Hume, and Rousseau, had been the received lions. Hume had taken up the wild philosopher whose melodramatic Armenian dress had been the attraction at the houses of the leaders of society, the ladies who (says Horace Walpole who was there this year) 'violated all the duties of life and gave very pretty suppers.' It was the day of Anglomania on the Continent, when the name of Chatham was a name to conjure with, and Hume was expounding deism to the great ladies,—'when the footmen were in the room,' adds the shocked Horace,—lionizing Hume 'who is the only thing they believe in implicitly; which they must do, for I defy them to understand any language that he speaks,' in allusion to the broad Scottish accent of the philosopher.

The fantastic attire of Rousseau may have suggested to Bozzy the Corsican dress in his valise, or he may have construed into a command, willingly enough, the hint Paoli had dropped to let them know at home how affairs were going. He waited on Chatham with it, and was received pompously but graciously, says the Earl of Buchan who was present, for a touch of melodrama was not uncongenial to the great minister, the 'Pericles of Great Britain,' as the general had styled him. Bozzy thanked him 'for the very genteel manner in which you are pleased to treat me.' In return, Chatham eulogized Paoli as one of Plutarch's men, as Cardinal de Retz had said of Montrose.

He saw Auchinleck in somewhat altered circumstances from those in which, four years before, he had left his father's house, riding through Glasgow 'in a cocked hat, a brown wig, brown coat made in the court fashion, red vest, corduroy small clothes, and long military-looking boots, with his servant riding a most aristocratic distance behind.' He had left it likely to vex the soul of his father, the laureate of doggerel, threatening to be the disgrace of the family; he returned as the acquaintance, in varying degrees of intimacy, of Johnson, Wilkes, Churchill, Goldsmith, the Earl Marischal, Voltaire, Rousseau, Paoli, Chatham, and plenipotentiaries of all kinds. A wonderful list for the raw youth they had known at home; yet nowhere in all his intercourse does he show the least want of self-possession or easy bearing. The 'facility of manners' and his good humour had carried him all through his curious experiences with German courts and Italian peasants. A 'spirited tour,' truly, if perhaps the moral results had been greater. The nobility and gentry of this country were welcomed abroad with but too great avidity. Italy, the garden of Europe, Bozzy declared to be the Covent Garden, and isolated passages in his book shew that he could not claim, like Milton, to have borne himself truly 'in all these places where so many things are considered lawful.' Fox, we know, did not escape the contagion of the grand tour, and Boswell had been 'caught young.'

Nor will the reader find much fault in what the adverse critics have unduly emphasized—his interviewing or forcing himself upon men. A man, as Johnson said to him when seeking an interlocutor on this point, always makes himself greater as he increases his knowledge. When he was at Dunvegan on his northern tour, and Colonel Macleod seemed to hint at this, Bozzy offers as

his defence of what 'has procured me much happiness' the eagerness he ever felt to share the society of men distinguished by their rank or talents. If a man, he adds, is praised for seeking knowledge, though mountains and seas are in his way, he may be pardoned in the pursuit of the same object under difficulties as great though of a different kind. And the defence will not be refused him for the use he has made of the means. Wisdom and literature alike are justified of their children, and the masters in either are not so numerous that we can afford to quarrel with them, or wrangle over their respective merits. 'Sensation,' said Johnson, '*is* sensation,' and the pretty general feeling now is that in his department Boswell is a master.

From his first setting out, he had written down every night what he had noted during the day, 'throwing together that I might afterwards make a selection at leisure.' He was to try his 'prentice hand on his *Tour in Corsica* before shewing his strength in his two greater works. Mrs Barbauld regarded him as no ordinary traveller, with

' Working thoughts which swelled the breast  
Of generous Boswell, when with noble aim  
And views beyond the narrow beaten track  
By trivial fancy trod, he turned his course  
From polished Gallia's soft delicious vales.'

Such thoughts were perhaps really foreign to that traveller, yet Dr Hill assures us that by every Corsican of education the name of Boswell is known and honoured. One curious circumstance is given. At Pino, when Boswell fancying himself 'in a publick house' or inn, had called for things, the hostess had said *una cosa dopo un'altra, signore*, 'one thing after another, sir.' This has lingered as a memento of Bozzy in Corsica, and has



been found by Dr Hill to be preserved among the traditions in the Tomasi family. Translations of the book in Italian, Dutch, French, and German, spread abroad the name of the traveller who, if like a prophet without honour in his own country, has not been without it elsewhere.

### CHAPTER III

EDINBURGH BAR—STRATFORD JUBILEE. 1766-69

‘ A clerk, foredoomed his father’s soul to cross,  
Who pens a stanza, when he should engross.’—POPE.

THE return of the prodigal to Auchinleck would seem at first to have been attended with some satisfaction to both father and son. The father might now believe that he was entitled to consideration from the son, as a reward for his long-continued indulgence to the traveller, who might in his turn reflect on the advantages which he derived from such a protracted tour. Accordingly, in his papers of the April of this year, we find the following entry:—‘My father said to me, “I am much pleased with your conduct in every respect.” After all my anxiety while abroad, here is the most perfect approbation and calm of mind. I never felt such *sollid* (*sic*) happiness.’ But the philosopher, who with Paoli had compared his mind to a camera obscura, reappears unfortunately in the next entry. ‘But I find I am not so happy with this approbation and this calm as I expected to be. But why do I say alas! when I really look upon this life merely as a transient state?’ To this curious expression of Boswell we shall refer when we discuss at the close his religious and philosophical views, but it is distressing to find such whimsicalities colouring his sense of the old man’s kindness

when he writes but shortly after, 'I must stay at Auchinleck, I have there just the kind of complaining proper for me. All must complain, and I more than most of my fellow-creatures.'

On the 26th July 1766 he passed advocate at the bar. On putting on his gown he remarked to his brother-advocates, as he says, that his natural propensities had led him to a military life, but now that he had been pressed by his father into the service he did not doubt but that he should shew as good results as those who had joined as volunteers. His gay friend Wilkes had declared that he would be out-distanced in the professional race by dull plodders and blockheads, but at the outset he appears to have started with a fair amount of zest. He dedicated his inaugural thesis to the son of the Earl of Bute, Lord Mountstuart, with whom he had travelled in Italy, and on whom he flattered himself he had made some impression, the first of Boswell's many ineffectual attempts to secure place and promotion, for on a seat in Parliament he had four years before set his heart. A copy of the thesis was sent to Johnson, who by this time had rather cooled over the proposed publication by his friend of a book on Corsica. 'You have no materials,' he said, 'which others have not or may not have. You have warmed your imagination. I wish there were some cure like the lover's leap for all heads of which some single idea has obtained an unreasonable and irregular possession. Mind your own affairs and leave the Corsicans to theirs.' Touching on the faulty Latinity of the essay, 'Ruddiman,' added the old man, 'is dead.' On entering his new career Bozzy began by vows for his good conduct. These, a remnant of his old Catholic days, we shall find him renewing again and again, ludicrously and pathetically enough, however, as we

draw to the close. Sometimes they appear with reference to matters with which the knowledge of the unpublished parts of the letters to Temple, now in the possession of an American collector, has to deal without suggesting unduly to the more fastidious sense of the present day the vagaries and weaknesses of their writer. Johnson protested against this attempt to 'enchain his volatility' by vows. But Boswell replies that they may be useful to one 'of a variable judgment and irregular inclinations. For my part, without affecting to be a Socrates, I am sure I have a more than ordinary struggle to maintain with the Evil Principle, and all the methods I can devise are little enough to keep me tolerably steady in the paths of rectitude.' Could the doctor have read even the published correspondence he would have been at no loss for a detailed commentary on this defence.

And coming events now cast their shadow before. That curious feature of Boswell's character, the mixture of religious sentiments and the Sterne vein of pietistic moralizing united with laxity in practice, appears strangely enough in the letter to Temple, dated in the February of 1767, and sent to his friend who had just been ordained to the living of Mamhead in Devon. 'I view,' he writes, 'the profession of a clergyman in an amiable and respectable light. Don't be moved by declamations against ecclesiastical history, as if that could blacken the sacred order.' He admits that ecclesiastical history is not the best field for the display of the virtues in that profession, but we are to judge of the thousands of worthy divines who have been a blessing to their parishes. He exhorts his friend to labour cheerfully in the vineyard and to leave not a tare in Mamhead. In Edinburgh it appears there were specimens; for after this pious homily he confesses

quietly his own *liaison* with 'a dear infidel' of a married woman. But the love affairs of Boswell, one of the most curious and 'characteristical' (as he would himself have phrased it) episodes in his life we shall discuss in a connected form in the next chapter, in order to secure clearness of treatment and concentration of detail.

We turn, then, to his career at the bar. There can be no shadow of a doubt that with proper industry, backed as he was with very strong social and family connections, he would have secured a lucrative professional practice. In February of 1767 he is 'coming into great employment; I have this winter made sixty-five guineas, which is a considerable sum for a young man,' and the *Boswelliana* shew him in easy intercourse with the best society in the Scottish capital. Belonging as he did to the hereditary *noblesse de la robe*, as Lockhart calls it, he was not likely, with but moderate attention, to have stood like Scott, 'an hour by the Tron, wi' deil ane to speir his price,'—Sir Walter's fee book shews for the first year a return of £24, 3s., and £57, 15s. for the second. As he had years before vowed to Lord Hailes that he would transcribe Erskine's *Institutes* several times over till he had imprinted it on his memory, so now he was hopeful by binding up the session papers of securing a treasure of law reasoning and a collection of extraordinary facts. By March he had cleared eighty guineas, and was 'Surprised at myself, I speak with so much ease and boldness, and have already the language of the bar so much at command. I am doing nobly. I can hardly ever answer the letters of my friends.' He had quarrelled with Rousseau who had likewise broken with Hume, whose appointment as secretary to Conway had perhaps cured him of his follies over the wild philosopher. We find Boswell also

designing squibs which were in the London printshops, writing verses for them and ridiculing 'The Savage' of his former idolatry.

Paoli had sent him a long letter of sixteen pages. Chatham in his retirement at Bath, mystifying the court and his colleagues, could yet find time to send him a three-paged communication. In reply, the young traveller assures him that the character of the great minister had 'filled many of my best hours with the noble admiration which a disinterested soul can enjoy in the bower of philosophy.' He informs his lordship that he is preparing for publication his *Tour in Corsica*, that he has entered at the bar, and 'I begin to like it. I labour hard; and feel myself coming forward, and I hope to be useful to my country. Could your Lordship *find time to honour me now and then with a letter?* I have been told how favourably your Lordship has spoken of me. To correspond with a Paoli and a Chatham is enough to keep a young man ever ardent in the pursuit of a virtuous fame.' In June he expected to be busier than ever, during the week when his father sat as Judge of the Outer House, 'for you must know that the absurdity of mankind makes nineteen out of twenty employ the son of the judge before whom their case is heard,' an admission which only increases our regret at the want of professional industry on the part of the son. His addiction to the society of players only increased the more as his practice at the bar would have been thought to engross his attention. For the opening of the Canongate Theatre, on 9th December 1767, he had been induced to write a prologue to the play of *The Earl of Essex* with which the newly licensed house started its career. Part of the opening verses, as spoken by Ross, 'a very good copy, very concilia-

tory' as the Earl of Mansfield styled them, runs as follows:—

' This night, lov'd *George's* free enlightened age  
Bids *Royal favour* shield the Scottish stage ;  
His Royal Favour every bosom cheers ;  
The drama now with dignity appears !  
Hard is my fate if murmurings there be  
Because that favour is announced by me.  
Anxious, alarm'd, and aw'd by every frown,  
May I entreat the candour of the Town ?  
You see me here by no unworthy art ;  
My *all* I venture where I've fix'd my heart.  
Fondly ambitious of an honest fame,  
My humble labours your indulgence claim.  
I wish to hold no *Right* but by your choice,  
I'll trust my patent to the Publick Voice.'

The effect of this, aided by friends properly planted in different parts of the theatre, Boswell assures us was instantaneous and effectual. But the plaudits given would have been better in a strictly professional court, and it led, we can see, to the association of Boswell with but questionable society. 'The joyous crew of thunderers in the galleries,' as Robert Fergusson describes them, the vulgar cits applying to their parched lips 'thirst quenching porter,' and the notoriously irregular lives of the players, all these were ties and associations ill calculated to appease the just indignation of his father or to add to forensic reputation in Edinburgh. The Scottish Themis, says Scott, speaking from his own early experience of much higher literary pursuits, is peculiarly jealous of any flirtation with the muses on the part of those who have ranged themselves under her banners, and to them the least lingering look behind is fatal. Little wonder, then, that the paternal anger was again roused, when 'the look behind' on his

part was coupled with the bitter remembrances of the laureate of the Soapers, of the Erskine Correspondence, and his own long indulgence destined at last to bear such sorry fruits.

‘How unaccountable it is,’ he cries impatiently to Temple, ‘that my father and I should be so ill together! He is a man of sense and a man of worth; but from some unhappy turn in his disposition he is much dissatisfied with a son you know. . . . To give you an instance. I send you a letter I had a few days ago. I have answered in my own style; I will be myself! How galling it is to the friend of Paoli to be treated so!’ He confesses his father has ‘that Scots strength of sarcasm which is peculiar to a North Briton,’ and that time was when it would have depressed him. But now he is firm, and, ‘as my revered friend Mr Samuel Johnson used to say,’ he feels the privileges of an independent human being! To add to the confusion of Lord Auchinleck his son had flung himself with all his enthusiasm into the famous Douglas Trial, the cause that figures so much to the confusion, it is to be feared, of the general reader. Of this some full account is necessary in order to explain that extraordinary trial,—perhaps the most protracted and famous that ever came before a court,—which, dragging its slow length along through a longer course than the Peloponnesian War, fills the shelves of legal libraries with eighteen portly volumes of papers and reports. In the case Boswell really held no actual brief, though were we to follow the impression he gives of his services we should infer he had been leading counsel for the plaintiff, Douglas. ‘With a labour of which few are capable,’ says Bozzy, many years after, ‘he compressed the substance of the immense volumes of proofs and arguments into an octavo pamphlet,’ to



which its author believed 'we may ascribe a great share of the popularity on Mr Douglas's side.' Then he adds in a characteristic sentence, the meaning of which can be fully appreciated only by those who have followed his contributions to magazines and the press of the day, 'Mr Boswell took care to keep the newspapers and other publications incessantly warm with various writings, both in prose and in verse, all tending to touch the heart and rouse the parental and sympathetic feelings.'

Lady Jane Douglas, sister to Archibald, Duke of Douglas, had been privately married in 1746 to Colonel Steuart, afterwards Sir John Steuart of Grandtully. She was then in the forty-ninth year of her age, and the marriage was not divulged till May 1748 to her brother who had not been reconciled and had in consequence suspended her allowance. At Paris, in very humble lodgings, she gave birth to male twins in the house of a Madame le Brun. The parents in 1749 returned to Scotland where one of the children died; in 1761 the Duke of Douglas had himself followed. Three claimants took the field, the Duke of Hamilton as heir male of line, the Earl of Selkirk as heir of provision under former deeds, and Archibald Steuart or Douglas. Lady Jane died in 1753, and Sir John in 1764, both on their death-beds testifying to the legitimacy of their surviving child. The Duke of Douglas, long prejudiced against this son's claim by the machinations of the Hamiltons, had revoked the deed in their favour for a settlement executed in behalf of his sister's son Archibald. But stories had become rife of that son being the child of a Nicholas Mignon and Marie Guerin from whom he had been purchased, and an action to reduce service on a plea of *partus suppositio* was instituted by the tutors of the Duke of Hamilton who was then a minor.

In France negotiations were conducted, investigations made, and witnesses examined by Burnet of Monboddo, Gardenstone, Hailes, and Eskgrove, and at last in July 1767 the Court of Session issued its decision. Lord Dundas, the President, speaking first, and dwelling on the age of Lady Jane, childless by a former marriage, the secrecy of the birth, and the intrinsic valuelessness of death-bed depositions when set against pecuniary interests and family pride, recorded his vote in favour of the Hamiltons. Six days were subsequently taken up with the speeches of the other judges, and Monboddo, speaking last, voted for Douglas. The verdict was seven on each side, and by the President's vote the case in Scotland was won by the pursuers. Kames, Monboddo, and Lord Auchinleck, were in favour of the defender, Douglas.

The case was at once by him appealed to the House of Lords. Douglas was favoured in Scotland, where for years the state of interest had been such that people in company used to bargain, for the maintenance of peace, that no mention of this disturbing plea should be introduced. So high did the feeling run in Edinburgh that the Hamilton party had been driven from their apartments in Holyrood Palace and their property plundered. It was fortunate that this loophole of escape to another court was opened, for before the Union such a cause would have led almost to civil broil where the rival interests of the factions, through the ramifications of marriage and other connections, extended so widely. In earlier days the strife would have ended by an appeal to the sword on the causeway. All the court influence of the Hamiltons had been bent, and bent in vain, to secure the exclusion from the bench of Lord Monboddo, counsel for Douglas, and a duel had been fought between their agent Andrew

Stuart and Thurlow the opposing advocate. The excitement over the verdict of the Lords on Monday, February 27, 1769, was unprecedented. In the *Autobiography of Jupiter Carlyle* is fortunately preserved the account of the scene, witnessed by the doctor himself, who had been successful in gaining admission to the court, where from nine in the morning till ten at night he remained, hemmed in by the crowd and overcome with the oppressive heat. Mansfield spoke over one hour, and, on his appearing to faint, the Chancellor rushed out for a bottle and glasses, the current of fresh air being felt by the crowd as a relief. Finally the verdict of the Scottish courts was reversed without a division, and a verdict found in favour of Douglas. Hume was not satisfied of the legitimacy of the pursuer, neither was Lord Shelburne, and bribery on both sides had been extensively employed, over £100,000 having been calculated to have been spent in this protracted litigation.

It was on the evening of Thursday, shortly after eight, that the tidings reached Edinburgh by express. The city was at once illuminated, and next morning Dundas on his way to the Parliament House was threatened by a mob such as the town had not seen since the Porteous Riot. Two troops of dragoons were drafted at once on the same day into the capital. As usually told, the story, which is vouched for by Ramsay of Ochtertyre, is that the mob of the night before had been headed by the excited Boswell, and that the windows of his father's house were smashed. Had such been the case, it must have been by an oversight on the part of the mob, or some petulant freak of the son, for on this occasion both Boswell and his father had for once been unanimous in their belief in the legitimacy of Douglas. But there is no need for

doubting Ramsay's assertion that Lord Auchinleck had, with tears in his eyes, to implore President Dundas to commit his son to the Tolbooth! Not only had Bozzy taken the field in the November of 1767 with his *Essence of the Douglas Cause*, 'which I regretted that Dr Johnson never took the trouble to study,' even though 'the question interested nations,' and the pamphlet had produced, as its writer flattered himself, considerable effect in deciding the case, but he had ventured on a breach of professional etiquette in publishing *Dorando, a Spanish Tale*. This brochure was ordered by the Court of Session to be suppressed as contempt of court, after it had run through three editions. No copy of this forlorn hope of the book hunter has ever been found, though doubtless it lurks in some library where its want of the writer's name upon the title page may have kept it from making its reappearance. Though it bore no name, yet Boswell, when writing to Temple over it, speaks of 'My publisher Wilkie,' and he seems to have been afraid that the copy sent by him should fall into the hands of strangers. In the *Gentleman's Magazine* for July 1767, however, it is reviewed, but the value of the shilling booklet does not seem to have impressed the critic. 'The Spanish Tale,' he says, 'supposes the contests to be finally determined in favour of *Don Ferdinand* against the family of Ardivoso—but the real question is still in dispute, having been removed by appeal to the House of Lords. The pamphlet is zealously but feebly written: the author in some places affects the sublime, and in some the pathetic; but these are the least tolerable parts of his performance.' Thus airily does the reviewer dismiss Bozzy's determined effort to rouse, as he imagined, the parental and sympathetical feelings, and it is clear at least that, however much its recovery would add to the

stock of harmless pleasure among professed Boswellians and collectors, its loss cannot be said to have 'eclipsed the gaiety of nations.'

During the course of the trial the *Tour in Corsica* had been preparing. Early in 1768 it was issued from the celebrated press of Robert and Andrew Foulis in Glasgow, and the publishers were the Dillys in the Poultry, London, who were to act for him in all his literary undertakings to the end of his life. It was a lull in the storm of the Douglas crisis, and the old judge, eager enough to see his son associated with anything rational, was not displeased with its appearing as a pledge of better things. 'Jamie,' he admitted, 'had taen a toot on a new horn.' The account of Corsica which had been made up from various sources of information ran to two hundred and thirty-nine pages; but the real interest of the volume attaches to the *Journal* which occupies a hundred and twenty. The translations from Seneca were done by Thomas Day, then very young, the author of *Sandford and Merton*, and the creator of that constellation of excellence, Mr Barlow, whose connection in any degree with Boswell is almost provocative of a smile. The peculiar orthography of the writer is defended in the preface, for he allows himself not only such divergencies as 'tremenduous,' 'authour,' 'ambassadour,' but also 'authentick' and 'panegyrick.' The dedication of the first edition to Paoli was dated on his own birthday, and the book ran to a third edition before the October of the same year. As purchased by the Dillys for a hundred guineas it would appear to have been a profitable speculation, and the wide circulation to which it attained we shall see was not merely due to accident but to more solid qualities. 'Pray read,' says Horace Walpole to his friend Gray, 'the new account of Corsica. The author

is a strange being, and has a rage of knowing everybody that ever was talked of. He forced himself upon me at Paris in spite of my teeth and my doors.' 'Mr B.'s book,' replies Gray—with a curious anticipation of the Carlylean canon of criticism—'has pleased and moved me strangely; all I mean that relates to Paoli. The pamphlet proves, what I have always maintained, that any fool may write a most valuable book by chance, if he will only tell us what he heard and saw *with veracity*. Of Mr B.'s book I have not the least suspicion, because I am sure he could invent nothing of the kind. The title of this part of his work is a dialogue between a Green Goose and a Hero.' But Gray was fastidious, in this case blindly so. The merits of Goldsmith he could when dying perceive, but the rollicking humour of Boswell in this his first book was sealed to the reclusive critic who 'never spoke out,' a thing that never could be safely asserted of the author of the *Tour in Corsica*.

That 'authour,' however, was now bent on extracting the sanction of approval from his idol. He hastened to London, heralding his arrival, as was his wont, by a deftly contributed paragraph to the papers. The society journals of to-day have not improved on Boswell in their method of obtaining first hand information; he was a most assiduous chronicler of his own actions, and there can be no doubt that there is much Boswell 'copy' buried in the pages of the papers of the time. From the *Public Advertiser* of February 28th we learn 'James Boswell, Esq., is expected in town,' and, on March 24th, 'yesterday James Boswell, Esq., arrived from Scotland at his lodgings in Half Moon Street, Piccadilly.' He had received no letter from Johnson since the one in which the Latinity of his thesis had been criticised, and Boswell had heard that

the publication in his book of a letter from his friend had given offence to its writer. Johnson was in Oxford at the time, and thither flew Boszy to obtain the approval of his labours and, with an eye to all future contingencies, his sanction for the publication *in his biography* of all Johnson's letters to him. 'When I am dead, sir,' was the reply, 'you may do as you will.'

'My book,' he writes eagerly to Temple, 'has amazing celebrity. Lord Lyttelton, Mr Walpole, Mrs Macaulay, and Mr Garrick, have all written me noble letters about it. There are two Dutch translations going forward.' General Oglethorpe, an old veteran who had seen service under Prince Eugene, and the friend of Pope whose verses upon him 'I had read from my early years,' called upon him and solicited his acquaintance. He became a sort of literary lion. 'I am really the great man now,' he cries; 'I have David Hume in the forenoon, Mr Johnson in the afternoon of the same day. I give admirable dinners and good claret, and the moment I go abroad again, which will be in a day or two, I set up my chariot. This is enjoying the fruit of my labours, and appearing like the friend of Paoli.' Alas for that friend!—he confesses to his correspondent that he has been 'wild.' The form of this outbreak may be sufficiently seen by the general reader in the leading questions which at this time Boswell is found putting to Johnson; for the *Life of Johnson*, as we shall indicate in its proper place, is no less the life of the biographer, whose mind was ever seeking to shelter itself under the guidance of a stronger force, and to effect a moral anchorage or moorings behind the lee of his great friend. When Boszy indulges in 'the luxury of noble sentiments,' he is often known to be courting an indemnity to his conscience for lax practice. Longfellow makes Miles Standish in his

belligerent mood turn in the Cæsar to where the thumb-marks in the margin proclaimed that the battle was hottest; Boswell often indicates the decline and fall of the moralist by an apparently undue vein of pietistic comments.

The next year was to witness the friend of Paoli in his most eccentric display—the Shakesperian Festival inaugurated by Garrick at Stratford. By this ludicrous gathering it is that Boswell is known to the mass of readers who have never cared to know more of ‘Corsica Boswell’ than what they can gather from the lively picture of Macaulay. There he is known only as it were in the gross, to which indeed, as Johnson said of Milton, the undramatic nature of the essayist’s mind was rather prone, careless as it was or incapable of the finer shades of character. Yet, as we know, he was not the solitary masker or mummer in this extraordinary carnival, which seems not creditable to the taste of its promoters, and resembles rather the entry of a travelling circus into a provincial town than a serious commemoration of a great man. However, ‘thither Mr Boswell repaired with all the enthusiasm of a poetical mind;’ as he informs us, ‘such an opportunity for the warbling of his Muse was not neglected.’ On Wednesday, Sept. 6th, about five in the morning, says *The Scots Magazine* for that month in its leading article, the performers from Drury Lane paraded the streets of Stratford, and serenaded the ladies with a ballad by Garrick, beginning

‘ Ye Warwickshire lads and ye lasses  
See what at our Jubilee passes ;  
Come revel away, rejoice and be glad,  
For the lad of all lads was a Warwickshire lad,  
                    Warwickshire lad,  
                    All be glad,  
For the lad of all lads was a Warwickshire lad.’



Guns were fired, the magistrates assembled, and there was a public breakfast in the town-hall. In this number of the magazine there is a letter extending to seven columns from James Boswell, Esq., on his return to London, after being 'much agitated' by 'this jubilee of genius.' He describes it as 'truly an antique idea, a Grecian thought;' the oratorio at the great Stratford church, with the music by Dr Arne, was, he admits, grand and admirable, but 'I could have wished that prayers had been read, and a short sermon preached.' Then the performance of the dedication ode by Garrick is described as 'noble and affecting, like an exhibition in Athens or Rome.' Lord Grosvenor, at the close, went up to Garrick, 'and told him that he had affected his whole frame, showing him his nerves and veins still quivering with agitation.' The masquerade our traveller, as the 'travelled thane,' affects to regard complacently as an 'entertainment not suited to the genius of the British nation, but to a warmer country, where the people have a great flow of spirits, and a readiness at repartee.' Bozzy no doubt had seen the carnival abroad, and his memories of sunnier skies would not find congenial atmosphere in the unpropitious weather when the Avon rose with the floods of rain, the lower grounds were laid under water, and a guinea for a bed was regarded as an imposition, though 'no one,' declares our hero, 'was understood to come there who had not plenty of money'—their own or their father's, presumably. The break up seems to have been effected in confusion, but the good-humoured mummer, taking one consideration with another, compares it to eating an artichoke, where 'we have some fine mouthfuls, but also swallow the leaves and the hair, which are confoundedly difficult of digestion. After all, I am highly satisfied with my artichoke.'

He brought 'the warbling of his muse' with him. It is no better or worse than the staple. In the character of a Corsican, he sings—

' From the rude banks of Golo's rapid flood,  
 Alas ! too deeply tinged with patriot blood ;  
 O'er which, dejected, injur'd Freedom bends,  
 And sighs indignant o'er all Europe sends,  
 Behold a Corsican ! In better days  
 Eager I sought my country's fame to raise.  
 Now when I'm exiled from my native land  
 I come to join this classic festal band ;  
 To soothe my soul on Avon's sacred stream,  
 And from your joy to catch a cheering gleam.'

After an apostrophe to happy Britons, on whose propitious isle propitious freedom ever deigns to smile, he closes with an appeal—

' But let me plead for liberty distress'd,  
 And warm for her each sympathetic breast ;  
 Amidst the splendid honours which you bear,  
 To save a sister island be your care ;  
 With generous ardour make us also free,  
 And give to Corsica a noble Jubilee.'

Colman and Foote, of course, as comedians were there, but Goldsmith and Johnson shewed their sense by their absence. The only trace of Davy's old master was found in a Coventry ribbon put out by 'a whimsical haberdasher,' with the motto from Johnson's *Prologue* at the opening of Drury Lane in 1747—'Each change of many colour'd life he drew.'

Boswell had a free hand as a writer for the *London Magazine*, in which he had a proprietary interest. To it he contributed the following account, accompanied with a portrait—the source of much of Macaulay's

indictment. 'One of the most remarkable masks upon this occasion was James Boswell, Esq., in the dress of an armed Corsican chief. He entered the amphitheatre about twelve o'clock. He wore a short dark-coloured coat of coarse cloth, scarlet waistcoat and breeches, and black spatterdashes; his cap or bonnet was of black cloth; on the front of it was embroidered in gold letters *viva la liberta*, and on one side of it was a handsome blue feather and cockade, so that it had an elegant as well as a warlike appearance. On the breast of his coat was sewed a Moor's head, the crest of Corsica, surrounded with branches of laurel. He had also a cartridge-pouch, into which was stuck a stiletto, and on his left side a pistol was hung upon the belt of his cartridge-pouch. He had a fusee slung across his shoulder, wore no powder in his hair, but had it plaited at full length with a knot of blue ribbons at the end of it. He had, by way of a staff, a very curious vine all of one piece, emblematical of the sweet bard of Avon. He wore no mask, saying it was not proper for a gallant Corsican. So soon as he came into the room he drew universal attention. The novelty of the Corsican dress, its becoming appearance, and the character of the brave nation concurred to distinguish the armed Corsican chief. He was first accosted by Mrs Garrick, with whom he had a good deal of conversation. There was an admirable dialogue between Lord Grosvenor, in the character of a Turk, and the Corsican on the different constitution of the countries so opposite to each other, —Despotism and Liberty; and Captain Thomson, of the navy, in the character of an honest tar, kept it up very well; he expressed a strong inclination to stand by the brave islanders. Mr Boswell danced both a minuet and a country dance with a very pretty lady, Mrs Sheldon, wife to Captain Sheldon, of the 38th Regiment of Foot,

who was dressed in a genteel domino, and before she danced threw off her mask.'

He adds a cool puff of his own verses, 'which, it is thought, are well suited to the occasion, while at the same time they preserve the true Corsican character.' About a month after this masquerade, Goldsmith dined at Boswell's lodging with Garrick, Johnson, Davies, and others, where 'Goldsmith,' says the biographer, 'strutted about, bragging of his dress, and I believe was seriously vain of it, for his mind was wonderfully prone to such impressions!' Boszy could criticise, as on all occasions, the bloom coloured coat of 'honest Goldsmith,' yet he was eager for Garrick to fall in with the idea of the tradesmen of Stratford to make the Jubilee an annual event in the interests of local trade, and 'I flatter myself with the prospect of attending you at several more Jubilees.'

Though he had again commenced in London his attendance on Johnson and note-taking, there was now a divided source of attraction. Things had gone hard with Paoli since Boswell had been in the island. In spite of his Irish brigades and his British volunteers, the overwhelming forces which the French were able to put in the field, on the cession of the island to them by the Genoese, brought to an end the stubborn resistance of the inhabitants. In the August of 1768 Boswell had raised in Scotland a subscription of £700 for ordnance furnished by the Carron Iron Work Company, and in 1769 there had issued from the press a little duodecimo, '*British Essays in favour of the Brave Corsicans* : collected and published by James Boswell, Esq.' The papers are twenty in number, some by himself, others by 'a gentleman whose name would do honour to any cause (whom we think to have been Trecothick, the successor of Beckford, as Lord Mayor of London), and

the greatest part furnished by persons unknown to me.' They deal with the dangers to trade from France and the Bourbon Compact, and point at the value of Corsica as a station superior to Gibraltar or Minorca. One paper signed 'P. J.' has the undoubted Boswellian touch in dealing with the sailors thrown idle by the cessation of the along-shore Mediterranean trade. 'None are less avaricious than our honest tars, nor have they, in reality, any reason to be discontented. Every common sailor has at least five and thirty shillings a month, over and above which *he has his victuals and drink, and that in great abundance.* There is no such thing as stinting aboard a ship, unless when reduced to difficulties by stormy weather. The crew have their three meals a day regularly, and if they should be hungry between meals, *there is always a biscuit or a luncheon of something cold to be had.*'

France had bought Corsica from Genoa in May 1768. Marbœuf, whom Boswell had found in the island, had been superseded, and a descent of the French under Count Vaux with 20,000 men ended the war. Paoli escaped to a ruinous convent on the shore, and, after lying there in concealment, he embarked on an English vessel bound for Leghorn. On September 20th he reached London, and the *Public Advertiser* of October 4th, through its faithful correspondent, informed its readers how 'On Sunday last General Paoli, accompanied by James Boswell, Esq., took an airing in Hyde Park in his coach.' On the evening of the 10th he was presented by the traveller to Johnson, who was highly pleased with the lofty port of the stranger and the easy 'elegance of manners, the brand of the soldier, *l'homme d'épée.*'

An impression is abroad that Boswell's books were not taken seriously. Nothing could be more remote

from the truth. The Whigs were in favour of his views, and Burke, together with Frederick the Great, believed our interests would suffer by the increase of French power in the Mediterranean. Shelburne, for Chatham had resigned before November 1768, was the advocate of similar views, telling our ambassador at Versailles to remonstrate with the French court, while Junius, in his letter to the Duke of Grafton, told the country that Corsica would never have been invaded by the French, but for the sight of a weak and distracted ministry. When the hand of Napoleon was heavy on the Genoese, they remembered that their cession of the island had made their master, by his birth at Ajaccio on August 15, 1769, a Frenchman. But the nation at the time of Boswell's books was weary of war, and their influence, though great, was not visible in any actual political results.

Boswell had expected to draw the sage on the subject of matrimony, having promised himself, as he says, a good deal of instructive conversation on the conduct of the married state. But the oracles were dumb. On his return to the north he was married, on the 25th November 1769, to his cousin. We find in the *Scots Magazine* of that month the following extracts under the list of marriages :—

‘At Lainshaw, in the shire of Air, JAMES BOSWELL, Esq., of Auchinleck, advocate, to MISS PEGGY MONTGOMERY, daughter of the late DAVID MONTGOMERY of Lainshaw, Esq.’

‘At Edinburgh, ALEXANDER BOSWELL, Esq., of Auchinleck, one of the Lords of Session and Justiciary, to Miss BETTY BOSWELL, second daughter of JOHN BOSWELL, Esq., of Balmuto, deceased.’

His father, now past sixty, had married again, and married a cousin for the second time, like his son on the present occasion. That they were married on the same day and at different places affords a clear indication that the father and son were no longer on the best of terms.

## CHAPTER IV

LOVE AFFAIRS—LITERARY CLUB. 1766-73

‘How happy could I be with either,  
Were t’other dear charmer away.’—GAY.

‘LOVE,’ wrote Madame de Stael, ‘is with man a thing apart, ’tis woman’s whole existence.’ This is not true at least of Boswell, for his love affairs fill as large a part in his life as in that of Benjamin Constant. A most confused chapter withal, and one that luckily was not known to Macaulay, whose colours would otherwise have been more brilliant. We find Bozzy paying his addresses at one and the same time to at least eight ladies, exclusive as this is of sundry minor divinities of a fleeting and more temporary nature not calling here for allusion. His first divinity was the grass-widow of Moffat, and here Temple had been compelled to remonstrate in spite of all the lover’s philandering about her freedom from her husband, who had used her ill. Were she unfaithful, he declares her worthy to be ‘pierced with a Corsican dagger,’ but in March he has found it too much like a ‘settled plan of licentiousness,’ discovering her to be an ill-bred rompish girl, debasing his dignity, without refinement, though handsome and lively. Then there is the quarrel and the reconciliation, she vowing she loved him more than ever she had done her husband, but meeting with opposition from his brother



David and others, who furnished the love-sick heart of her adorer with examples of her faithlessness such as made him recoil. He vows now his frailties are at an end, and he resolves to turn out an admirable member of society. He had broken with her as with the gardener's daughter a year ago—an everlasting lesson to him.

By March 1767 the reigning favourite was Miss Bosville of Yorkshire. But his lot being cast in Scotland would be an objection to the beauty; then we hear of a young lady in the vicinity of whose claims Lord Auchinleck approved, because their lands lay happily together for family extension. She was just eighteen, pious, good-tempered and genteel, and for four days she had been on a visit to 'the romantick groves' of his ancestors, when suddenly the scene is changed for the Sienese *signora* of whom we heard upon his travels. 'My Italian angel,' he cries, 'is constant; I had a letter from her but a few days ago, which made me cry.' He conjures his friend Temple to come to him, and 'on that Arthur Seat where our youthful fancies roved abroad shall we take counsel together.' The local divinity we learn is Miss Blair of Adamtown; he has been drinking her health, and aberrations from sobriety and virtue have ensued, but he thought things would be brought to a climax were Temple to visit her. A long letter of commission follows, the envoy is instructed to appear as his old friend, praising him to Miss Blair for his good qualities. Temple is adjured to dwell upon his odd, inconstant, impetuous nature, how he is accustomed to women of intrigue, and he is to ask of the fair one if she does not think there is insanity in the Boswell family. She is to hear of his travels, his acquaintance with foreign princes, Voltaire and Rousseau, his desire to have a house of his own; and then he diverges into

practicality when he desires his friend to 'study the mother,' and take notes of all that passed, as it might have the effect of fixing the fate of the lover. Temple, it may be imagined, did not interpret his commission in such a literal spirit, and inconstancy and insanity could hardly be recommendations in Miss Blair's eyes. That such should be the case,—outside the confessions of Mr Rochester in *Jane Eyre*,—would appear to the commissioner an obvious fact.

A silence followed on Temple's departure from the divinity. Boswell dreaded a certain nabob, 'a man of copper,' as his rival. Then he believed the fair offended by his own Spanish stateliness and gravity; and again a letter, 'written with all the warmth of Italian affection,' restores the *signora* to the first place, from which she is deposed by a note from Miss Blair, explaining that his letter had been delayed a week at the Ayr post-office. Then fresh ravings, clouded by the belief that she is cunning and sees his weakness, for three people at Ayr have assured him she is a jilt, and he is shocked at the risk he has run, a warning for the future to him against 'indulging the least fondness for a Scotch lass.' He has, he feels, a soul of a more Southern frame, and some Englishwoman ought to be sensible of his merit, though the Dutch translator of his *Tour*, Mademoiselle de Zuyl, has been writing to him. Random talking is his dread, he must guard against it, and Miss Blair revives. 'I must have her learn the harpsichord,' he cries, 'and French; she shall be one of the finest women in the island.' Later on they have had a long meeting, of which space only prevents the inimitable reproduction,—'squeezing and kissing her fine hand, while she looked at me with those beautiful black eyes.' He meets her at the house of Lord Kames, he sees her at *Othello*—she was in tears at

the affecting scenes, and 'rather leaned' to him (he thought), and 'the jealous Moor described my own soul.' But true love did never yet run smooth; he has been 'as wild as ever. Trust me in time coming; I will give you my word of honour.' Then—curious psychological trait—'to-morrow I shall be happy with my devotions.'

By the beginning of 1768 he fears all is over. A rumour—a false one as it proved—had reached him that the divinity was to be married to Sir Alexander Gilmour, M.P. for Midlothian. He gets friendly with the nabob, warms him with old claret, and bewails with him their hapless devotion. They agree to propose in turn, and, being in turn rejected, he feels sure that 'a Howard, or some other of the noblest in the kingdom' is to be his fate. The Dutch translator again holds the field, to be soon dismissed for her frivolity and her infidelity. Then Miss Dick of Prestonfield reigns with solid qualifications—she lacks a fortune, but is fine, young, healthy, and amiable. A visit to Holland, to finally decide on the Mademoiselle's claims, was proposed, but his father, warned in time, would not consent. Temple, too, was against this, and 'Temple thou reasonest well,' he cries, and thinks his abnegation will be a solace to his worthy father on his circuit. Freed now from Miss Blair and the Dutch divinity, he is devoted to *la belle Irlandaise*, 'just sixteen, with the sweetest countenance and a Dublin education.' Never till now had he been so truly in love; every flower is united, and she is a rose without a thorn. Her name 'Mary Anne' he has carved upon a tree, and cutting off a lock of her hair she had promised Bozzy not to marry a lord before March, or forget him. 'Sixteen,' he says; 'innocence and gaiety make me quite a Sicilian swain.'

His book had dissipated his professional energies, and he had even taken to gaming. Incidentally we learn that he had lost more than he could pay, and that Mr Sheridan had advanced enough to clear him, on a promise that he should not engage in play for three years. Mary Anne has added to his complications by her forgetfulness, and the local candidate Miss Blair reappears. Favoured as she was by his father, it would have been easy to bring things to a climax, but on her mother's part there was some not unnatural coldness over his indiscreet talk about his love of the heiress. Boszy was a convivial knight-errant in what was called 'Saving the ladies.' At clubs and gatherings any member would toast his idol in a bumper, and then another champion would enter his peerless Dulcinea in two bumpers, to be routed by the original toper taking off four. The deepest drinker 'saved his lady,' as the phrase ran; though, says George Thomson speaking of the old concerts in St Cecilia's Hall, at the foot of Niddry's Wynd, which were maintained by noblemen and gentlemen, the bold champion had often considerable difficulty in *saving himself* from the floor, in his efforts to regain his seat! Miss Burnet of Monboddo, celebrated by Burns, and Miss Betty Home, he describes as the reigning beauties of the time deeply involved in thus causing the fall of man. Boswell was not behind, and he ascribes his aberrations to the 'drinking habit which still prevails in Scotland,' renewing good intentions, only to be broken in the same letter that reveals the Moffat lady again, 'like a girl of eighteen, with the finest black hair,' whom he loves so much that he is in a fever. '*This,*' he adds truly enough, '*is unworthy of Paoli's friend.*'

The May of 1769 saw him in Ireland, where his relations in County Down secured his entry into the

best society. A dispatch to the *Public Advertiser*, of July 7th, informed the public that 'James Boswell, Esq., dined with His Grace the Duke of Leinster at his seat at Carton. He went by special invitation to meet the Lord Lieutenant; came next morning with his Excellency to the Phoenix Park, where he was present at a review of Sir Joseph Yorke's dragoons; he dined with the Lord Mayor, and is now set out on his return to Scotland.' The *belle Irlandaise* had forgotten him, but it is to this occasion that we may refer some verses that were published by his son Sir Alexander. Chambers thinks they refer to his cousin, but the general belief tends in the direction of the notorious Margaret Caroline Rudd, the associate in later years of the brothers Perreau, who were executed for forgery. In the *Life of Johnson* we find Boswell, in 1776, expressing to his companion a desire to be introduced to this person, so celebrated for her address and insinuation, and later on he is shewn, on his own confession, to have visited her, 'induced by the fame of her talents and irresistible power of fascination,' and to have sent an account of this interview to his wife, but to have offered its perusal first, 'as it appeared to me highly entertaining,' to Temple, who was indignant over it. It would appear, then, that Boswell did not reveal to Johnson his former flirtation with this notorious woman, but we think that the obvious marks of the brogue in the verses shew conclusively that either the feeling was imitative and based on an earlier Irish song, or that the verses were judged by Boswell's son, not too devoted, as we shall find, to his father's memory, to be free from offence.

'O Larchan Clanbrassil, how sweet is thy sound,  
To my tender remembrance as Love's sacred ground ;

For there Marg'ret Caroline first charm'd my sight,  
And fill'd my young heart with a flutt'ring delight.

When I thought her my own, ah ! too short seemed the *day*  
For a jaunt to Downpatrick, or a trip on the *sea* ;  
To express what I felt, then all language was vain,  
'Twas in truth what the poets have studied to feign.

But, too late, I found even she could *deceive*,  
And nothing was left but to sigh, weep, and *rave* ;  
Distracted, I flew from my dear native shore,  
Resolved to see Larghan Clanbrassil no more.

Yet still in some moments enchanted I find  
A ray of her fondness beams soft on my mind ;  
While thus in bless'd fancy my angel I see,  
All the world is a Larghan Clanbrassil to me.'

On this journey with Boswell there was a Margaret—his own cousin, and it is curious to find him in this mood of sentimental philandering, were it no worse, when we have now to see Bozzy at the end of his love affairs. When his great work was completed in 1791, its author contributed to the *European Magazine* for May and June a little sketch of himself, in order to give a fillip to its circulation. There he describes jauntily his Irish tour, and after what we know of his erratic course, it is delightful to come across this sage chronicler of his dead wife, circulating testimonials to her excellences, to which no doubt he was oblivious in her lifetime. 'They had,' he writes, 'from their earliest years lived in the most intimate and unreserved friendship.' His love of the fair sex has been already mentioned (he had quoted the song of 'the Soapers' in our first chapter), and she was the constant yet prudent and delicate *confidante* of all his '*egarements du coeur et de l'esprit*.' This we may doubt, and the gracefully allusive French quotation reminds us of Mr Pepys' use of that language

when his wife was in his mind. This jaunt was the occasion of Mr Boswell's resolving at last to engage himself in that connection to which he had always declared himself averse. In short, he determined to become a married man. He requested her, with her excellent judgment and more sedate manners, to do him the favour of accepting him with all his faults, and though he assures his readers he had uniformly protested that a large fortune had been with him a requisite in the fair, he was yet 'willing to waive that in consideration of her peculiar merit!'

Hearts are caught in the rebound, and Bozzy had solaced his loss of the *belle Irlandaise* with the sympathy of his fellow-traveller. Having let his fancies roam so far abroad as Siena and Holland, the lover had now returned like the bird at evening to the nest from which it flew. She had no fortune, and 'the penniless lass wi' the lang pedigree,' related as she was to the Eglintoun branch and other high families, had not in the eyes of his father the landed qualifications of Miss Blair, whose property lay so convenient for the extension of the Boswell acres. This may have been the cause of the paternal anger and the separate marriages on the same day. The wives of literary men have ever been a fruitful source of disquisition to the admirers of their heroes, and Terentia, Gemma Donati, and Anne Hathaway, have divided the biographers of Cicero, Dante, and Shakespeare. To us it seems that, like his father, she had much to bear, hampered by their domestic difficulties through her husband's constant dependence on that father for his income, and eyed with undeserved suspicion by the judge and his second wife as a Mordecai in the gate, penniless and yet supposed to be the cause of Boswell's pecuniary embarrassments and indiscretions. The marriage was

deferred till after the Stratford Jubilee, and the newly married pair took up their house in Chessel's Buildings in the Canongate. For a year and a half after his marriage his correspondence with Johnson underwent an entire cessation, and in the August of 1771 General Paoli made a tour in Scotland, which, for a time, called forth the best organizing abilities of his friend. From the *London Magazine* of the day, in an account contributed by our hero, we learn how Paoli had paid 'a visit to James Boswell, Esq., who was the first gentleman of this country who visited Corsica, and whose writings have made the brave islanders and their general properly known over Europe.' Boswell waited on the exile and the Polish Ambassador at Ramsay's Inn, at the foot of St Mary's Wynd, visiting with them Linlithgow and Carron, 'where the general had a prodigious pleasure in viewing the forge where were formed the cannon and war-like stores' sent to Corsica by his Scottish admirers. At Glasgow they were entertained by the professors, and saw 'the elegant printing of the Scottish Stephani, the Messrs Foulis,' and no doubt their guide managed to remind their excellencies of a certain *Tour in Corsica* emanating thence. Auchinleck was visited to 'the joy of my worthy father and me at seeing the Corsican Hero in our romantick groves,' as he tells Garrick, and on their return to Glasgow the freedom of the city was conferred on Paoli by Lord Provost Dunlop.\* At Edinburgh 'the general slept under the roof of his ever grateful friend.' The whole forms a favourable specimen of Boswell's organizing capacities, and viewed in relation

\* By the Town Clerk Depute of Glasgow, R. Renwick, Esq., we are informed that no notice of this enrolment of General Paoli was entered at the time, pursuant to the custom of the Register over honorary burgessships.



to the friendly intercourse he is found maintaining with prominent and influential persons, our regret is but increased that in the interests of his wife and children his abilities were not exercised in a more strictly professional channel.

London he visited in the March of 1772 over an appeal to the Lords from the Court of Session. Johnson was now in good health, and was eager 'to see Beattie's College.' In the *Scots Magazine* for February 1773 there is mentioned a masked ball, attended by seventy persons of quality, given in Edinburgh by Sir Alexander Macdonald and his wife, Miss Bosville of Yorkshire, one of Boswell's loves. Croker says that the masquerade for which he was rallied by Johnson was given by the Dowager Countess of Fife, and that Bozzy went as a dumb conjurer; but from the expression of the *Magazine*, 'an entertainment little known in this part of the Kingdom,' coupled with the words employed by Johnson, there can be no doubt that Croker is wrong, and that the host on this occasion was the churlish chief, whose inhospitable ways they were to experience in Skye. He was now near the great honour of his life, admission to that Literary Club, of which, said Sir William Jones, 'I will only say that there is no branch of human knowledge on which some of our members are not capable of giving information.' Never was honour better deserved or better repaid. Without his record the fame of that club would have passed away, surviving at best in some sort of hazy companionship with the Kit-Cat, Button's, Will's, and other clubs and assemblies. Never was there a club of which each member was better qualified to take care of his own fame with posterity. None of Johnson's associates would have hesitated in declaring an extended date of renown for the *Rambler*; and perhaps he himself would have staked the reputation

assured, as Cowper said, by the tears of bards and heroes in order to immortalize the dead, on his *Rasselas* or the *Dictionary*. Yet he and most members of that club, apart from the record of Boswell, would be but names to the literary antiquary, and be by the mass of readers entirely forgotten.

He had canvassed the members. Johnson wrote, on April 23rd, to Goldsmith, who was in the chair that evening, to consider Boswell as proposed by himself in his absence. On the night of the ballot, April 30th, Boswell dined at Beauclerk's, where, after the company had gone to the club, he was left till the fate of his election should be announced. After Johnson had taken the thing in hand there was not much danger, yet poor Bozzy 'sat in a state of anxiety which even the charming conversation of Lady Di Beauclerk could not entirely dissipate.' There he received the tidings of his election, and he hastened to the place of meeting. Burke he met that night for the first time, and on his entrance, Johnson, 'with humorous formality, gave me a *charge*, pointing out the conduct expected from me as a good member of the club.' That charge we can believe Forster to be right in suspecting to be a caution against publishing abroad the proceedings and the talk of the members.

In the autumn of the year, as they drew near to Monboddo, Johnson, we should think with excessive rudeness, told him 'several of the members wished to keep you out. Burke told me, he doubted if you were fit for it: but, now you are in, none of them are sorry. Burke says, that you have so much good humour naturally, it is scarce a virtue.' The faithful Bozzy replied, 'They were afraid of you, sir, as it was you who proposed me;' and the doctor was prone to admit that if the one blackball necessary to exclude had been given, they knew they never would have got in another mem-

ber. Yet even from this rebuff he managed to deftly extract a compliment. Beauclerk, the doctor said, had been very earnest for the admission, and Beauclerk, replied Boswell, 'has a keenness of mind which is very uncommon.' The witty Topham, along with Reynolds, Garrick, and others, is immortalized in the pages of the man who was not thought by the wits of Gerrard Street fit for their club.

## CHAPTER V

### TOUR TO THE HEBRIDES. 1773

‘ Breaking the silence of the seas  
Among the farthest Hebrides.’—WORDSWORTH.

WHEN Boswell was leaving London in May he called, for the last time, upon Goldsmith, round whom the clouds of misfortune were fast settling, and who was planning a *Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* as a means of extrication from his embarrassments. In such circumstances, it was not unnatural for Goldsmith to revert to his own past travels, and to the reflection that he was unlikely again to set out upon them, unless sheltered like Johnson behind a pension. He assured Boswell that he would never be able to lug the dead weight of the Rambler through the Highlands. The enthusiastic pioneer, however, was loud in the praises of his companion; Goldsmith thought him not equal to Burke, ‘who winds into a subject like a serpent.’ The other, with more than wonted irrelevance, maintained that Johnson was ‘the Hercules who strangled serpents in his cradle;’ and with these characteristic utterances they parted, never again to meet. Throughout his great work, Boswell shews ever a curious depreciation of Goldsmith. Rivalry for the good graces of their common friend Johnson, as Scott thought, and the fear of his older acquaintance as the possible biographer

made him suspicious of the merits of the poet, who figures in the pages of Boswell as a foil for his gently patronizing tone,—‘honest Goldsmith.’

The tour to the Hebrides had been a project which had occurred to them in the first days of their friendship. The *Description of the Western Isles of Scotland* (1703) by Martin, had been put into Johnson’s hands at a very early age by his father ; and, though for long he had disappointed the expectations of his friend, he had talked of it in the spring of this year in such a way as to lead Boswell to write to Beattie, Robertson, Lord Elibank, and the chiefs of the Macdonalds and the Macleods, for invitations such as he could shew the doctor. Mrs Thrale also and others were induced to forward the scheme, and at last the Rambler set out on the 6th day of August. He was nine days upon the road, including two at Newcastle, where he picked up his friend Scott (Lord Stowell), and after passing Berwick, Dunbar and Prestonpans, the coach late in the evening deposited Johnson at Boyd’s inn, *The White Horse*, in the Canongate,—the rendezvous of the old Hanoverian faction,—which occupied the site of the present building from which this volume, one hundred and twenty-three years later, is published. On the Saturday evening of his arrival a note was dispatched by him to Boswell, who flew to him, and ‘exulted in the thought that I now had him actually in Caledonia.’

Arm in arm they walked up the High Street to Boswell’s house in James’s Court, to which he had removed from the Canongate. The first impression of the Scottish capital was not pleasing, for at ten the beat of the city drums was heard ; and, amid cries of *gardy loo*, what Oldham euphemistically calls ‘the perils of the night,’ were thrown over the windows down on the pavement, in the absence of covered

sewers. When Captain Burt before this time had been in Edinburgh, a 'caddie' had preceded him on a scouting expedition with cries of 'haud your han', and among flank and rear discharges he had passed to his quarters. A zealous Scotsman, as Boswell says, could have wished the doctor to be less gifted with the sense of smell, however much the sense of the breadth of the street and the height of the buildings impressed him. His wife had tea waiting, and they sat till two in the morning. To shew respect for the sage, Mrs Boswell had given up her own room, which her husband 'cannot but gratefully mention, as one of a thousand obligations which I owe her, since the great obligation of her being pleased to accept of me as her husband.'

Next morning, on the Sunday, Mr Scott and Sir Wm. Forbes of Pitsligo breakfasted with them, and the host's heart was delighted by the 'little infantine noise' which his child Veronica made, with the appearance of listening to the great man. The fond father with a cheerful recklessness, not realized we fear, declared she should have for this five hundred pounds of additional fortune.

The best society in the capital was invited to meet Johnson at breakfast and dinner—Robertson, Hailes, Gregory, Blacklock, and others. James's Court was rather a distinguished part of the city, and an improvement upon the former quarters in Chessel's Buildings. The inhabitants, says Robert Chambers, took themselves so seriously as to keep a clerk to record their proceedings, together with a scavenger of their own, and held among themselves their social meetings and balls. Hume had occupied part of the house before Johnson's visit, though three years had passed since he had moved to the new town into St David Street.

Writing from his old house to Adam Smith, he is glad to 'have come within sight of you, and to have a view of Kirkcaldy from my windows;' the study of the historian, to which he turned fondly from the Parisian *salons*, is represented in *Guy Mannering* as the library of Pleydell with its fine view from the windows, 'which commanded that incomparable prospect of the ground between Edinburgh and the sea, the Firth of Forth with its islands, and the varied shore of Fife to the northward.' Boszy may have been reticent about the former tenant; he was 'not clear that it was right in me to keep company with him,' though he thought the man greater or better than his books. No word then was sent to him, nor to Adam Smith across the Forth to Kirkcaldy. They visited the Parliament House, where Harry Erskine was presented to Johnson, and, having made his bow, slipped a shilling into Boswell's hand, 'for the sight of his bear.' Holyrood and the University were inspected, and as they passed up the College-Wynd, where Goldsmith in his medical student days in Edinburgh had lived, Scott, as a child of two years, may have seen the party. On the 18th they set out from the capital, with the Parthian shot from Lord Auchinleck to a friend—'there's nae hope for Jamie, man; Jamie is gaen clean gyte. What do you think, man? He's done wi' Paoli. He's off wi' the land-louping scoundrel of a Corsican, and whose tail do you think he has pinned himself to now, man? A dominie, an auld dominie; he keepit a schule and ca'ad it an acaadamy!" No more bitter taunt could have been levelled against Johnson, with his memories of Edial, near Lichfield; readers who may remember the munificent manner in which the heritors of their day had provided for Ruddiman, Michael Bruce, and others,

will see the contempt that the old judge had felt for the past of the Rambler. Johnson had left behind him in a drawer a volume of his diary; and, as this would have been excellent copy for his projected *Life*, we feel the temptation to which Boswell was exposed. 'I wish,' he says naïvely, 'that female curiosity had been strong enough to have had it all transcribed; which might easily have been done; and I think the theft, being *pro bono publico*, might have been forgiven. But I may be wrong. My wife told me she never once had looked into it. She did not seem quite easy when we left her; but away we went!'

The character-sketch of Johnson, given at the opening of the book is full of fine shading and touches; but the traveller who now follows them on the journey will hardly, in comparison with his own tourist attire, recognise what in 1773 was thought fit and convenient costume.

'He wore a full suit of plain brown clothes, with twisted hair buttons of the same colour, a large bushy greyish wig, a plain shirt, black worsted stockings, and silver buckles. Upon this tour, when journeying, he wore boots, and a very wide brown cloth greatcoat, with pockets which might have almost held the two volumes of his folio *Dictionary*; and he carried in his hand a large English oak stick. Let me not be censured for mentioning such minute particulars. Everything relative to so great a man is worth observing. I remember Dr Adam Smith, in his rhetorical lectures at Glasgow, told us he was glad to know that Milton wore latchets in his shoes, instead of buckles.'

A companion vignette of himself is added by Boswell.

'A gentleman of ancient blood, the pride of which was his predominant passion. He was then in his thirty-third year, and had been about four years happily married. His inclination was to be a soldier; but his father had pressed him into the profession of



the law. He had travelled a good deal, and seen many varieties of human life. He had thought more than anyone had supposed, and had a pretty good stock of general learning and knowledge. He had rather too little, than too much prudence; and, his imagination being lively, he often said things of which the effect was very different from the intention. He resembled sometimes

‘The best good man, with the worst natur’d muse.’

The doctor who was thrifty over this tour had not thought it necessary to bring his own black servant; but Boswell’s man, Joseph Ritter, a Bohemian, a fine stately fellow over six feet, who had been over much of Europe, was invaluable to them in their journey. For this the valiant Rambler had provided a pair of pistols, powder, and a quantity of bullets, but the assurance of their needlessness had induced him to leave them behind with the precious diary in the keeping of Mrs Boswell.

Such a tour was then a feat for a man of sixty-four, in a country which, to the Englishman of his day, was as unknown as St Kilda is now to the mass of Scotchmen. The London citizen who, says Lockhart, ‘makes Loch Lomond his wash-pot, and throws his shoe over Ben Nevis,’ can with difficulty imagine a journey in the Hebrides with rainy weather, in open boats, or upon horseback over wild moorland and morasses, a journey that even to Voltaire sounded like a tour to the North Pole. Smollett, in *Humphrey Clinker*, says the people at the other end of the island knew as little of Scotland as they did of Japan, nor was Charing Cross, witness as it did the greatest height of ‘the tide of human existence,’ then bright with the autumnal trips of circular tours and Macbrayne steamers. The feeling for scenery, besides, was in its infancy, nor was it scenery but men and manners that were sought by our two travellers, to

whom what would now be styled the Wordsworthian feeling had little or no interest. Gibbon has none of it, and Johnston laughed at Shenstone for not caring whether his woods and streams had anything good to eat in them, 'as if one could fill one's belly with hearing soft murmurs or looking at rough cascades.' Fleet Street to him was more delicious than Tempe, and the bare scent of the pastoral draws an angry snort from the critic. Boswell, in turn, confesses to no relish for nature; he admits he has no pencil for visible objects, but only for varieties of mind and *esprit*. The *Critical Review* congratulated the public on a fortunate event in the annals of literature for the following account in Johnson's *Journey*—'I sat down on a bank, such as a writer of romance might have delighted to feign. I had, indeed, no trees to whisper over my head but a clear rivulet streamed at my feet. The day was calm, the air soft, and all was rudeness, silence and solitude. Before me, and on either side, were high hills, which, if hindering the eye from ranging, forced the mind to find entertainment for itself.' This, little more than the reflections of a Cockney on a hayrick, is as far as the eighteenth century could go, nor need we wonder that the Rambler's moralizing at Iona struck so much Sir Joseph Banks, the President of the Royal Society, that he 'clasped his hands together, and remained for some time in an attitude of silent admiration.' Burns himself, as Prof. Veitch has rightly indicated, has little of the later feeling and regards barren nature with the unfavourable eyes of the farmer and the practical agriculturist, nor has the travelled Goldsmith more to shew. Writing from Edinburgh, he laments that 'no grove or brook lend their music to cheer the stranger,' while at Leyden, 'wherever I turned my eye, fine houses, elegant gardens, statues,

grottoes, presented themselves.' Even Gray found that Mount Cenis carried the permission mountains have of being frightful rather too far, and Wordsworth and Shelley would have resented the Johnsonian description of a Highland Ben as 'a considerable protuberance.' Indeed, Goldsmith's bare mention of that object, so dear to Pope and his century,—'grottoes'—reminds us we are not yet in the modern world. Yet the boldness of the sage, and the cheerfulness of Boswell, carried them through it all. 'I should,' wrote the doctor to Mrs Thrale, 'have been very sorry to have missed any of the inconveniences, to have had more light or less rain, for their co-operation crowded the scene and filled the mind.'

Crossing the Firth, after landing on Inchkeith, they arrived at St Andrews which had long been an object of interest to Johnson. They passed Leuchars, Dundee, and Aberbrothick. The ruins of ecclesiastical magnificence would seem to have touched a hidden chord in Boswell's past, for we find him on the road talking of the 'Roman Catholick faith,' and leading his companion on transubstantiation; but this, being 'an awful subject, I did not then press Dr Johnson upon it.' Montrose was reached, and at the inn the waiter was called 'rascal' by the Rambler for putting sugar into the lemonade with his fingers, to the delight of Bozzy who rallied him into quietness by the assurance that the landlord was an Englishman. Monboddoo was then passed, where 'the magnetism of his conversation drew us out of our way,' though the prompt action of Boswell as agent in advance really was the source of their invitation. Burnet was one of the best scholars in Scotland, and 'Johnson and my lord spoke highly of Homer.' All his paradoxes about the superiority of the ancients, the existence of men with tails, slavery and other institutions

were vented, but all went well. The decrease of learning in England, which Johnson lamented, was met by Monboddo's belief in its extinction in Scotland, but Boszy, as the old High School of Edinburgh boy, put in a word for that place of education and brought him to confess that it did well.

The New Inn at Aberdeen was full. But the waiter knew Boswell by his likeness to his father who put up here on circuit—the only portrait, we believe, there is of Lord Auchinleck—and accommodation was provided. They visited King's College, where Boswell 'stepped into the chapel and looked at the tomb of its founder, Bishop Elphinstone, of whom I shall have occasion to write in my history of James IV., the patron of my family.' The freedom of the city was conferred on Johnson. Was this an honour, or an excuse for a social glass among the civic Solons of an unreformed corporation? The latter may be the case, when we reflect that none of the four universities thought of giving him an honorary degree, though Beattie at this time had received the doctorate in laws from Oxford, and Gray some years before this had declined the offer from Aberdeen. Nor can we forget the taunt of George Colman the younger about Pangloss in his *Heir at Law*, and his own recollection how, when a lad at King's College, he had been 'scarcely a week in Old Aberdeen when the Lord Provost of the New Town invited me to drink wine with him, one evening in the Town Hall;' and presented him on October 8th, 1781, with the freedom of the city. No negative inference can be established from the contemporary notices in the *Aberdeen Journal* over the visit. Every paragraph is contemptuous in its tone; and till October 4th no notice is taken of the honour, when 'a correspondent says he is glad to find that the city of Aberdeen has

presented Dr Johnson with the freedom of that place, for he has sold his freedom on this side of the Tweed for a pension.' The definition of *oats* in the Dictionary is brought up against its author, and Bozzy is also attacked in a doggerel epigram on his Corsican Tour and his system of spelling. But the doctor easily maintained his conversational supremacy over his academic hosts, who 'started not a single mawkin for us to pursue.'

Ellon, Slains Castle, and Elgin were visited. They passed Gordon Castle at Fochabers, drove over the heath where Macbeth met the witches, 'classic ground to an Englishman,' as the old editor of Shakespeare felt, and reached Nairn, where now they heard for the first time the Gaelic tongue, — 'one of the songs of Ossian,' quoth the justly incredulous doctor, — and saw peat fires. At Fort George they were welcomed by Sir Eyre Coote. The old military aspirations of Bozzy flared up and were soothed: 'for a little while I fancied myself a military man, and it pleased me.' As they left, the commander reminded them of the hardships by the way, in return as Boswell interposed for the rough things Johnson had said of Scotland. 'You must change your name, sir,' said Sir Eyre. 'Ay, to Dr M'Gregor,' replied Bozzy. The notion of the lexicographer's assuming the forbidden name of the bold outlaw, with 'his foot upon his native heath,' is rather comic, though later on we find him striding about with a target and broad sword, and a bonnet drawn over his wig! Though both professed profuse addiction to Jacobite sentiments, it is curious no mention is made of Culloden. It may be that Boswell, who some days later weeps over the battle, may have diplomatically avoided it, or it may have been dark as their chaise passed it, though it is not impossible that Boswell,

who at St Andrews had not known where to look for John Knox's grave, and has no mention of Airmoss where Cameron fell in his own parish of Auchinleck, was ignorant of the site. From their inn at Inverness he wrote to Garrick gleefully over his tour with Davy's old preceptor, and then begged permission to leave Johnson for a time, 'that I might run about and pay some visits to several good people,' finding much satisfaction in hearing every one speak well of his father.

On Monday, August 30, they began their *equitation*; 'I would needs make a word too.' They took horses now, a third carried his man Ritter, and a fourth their portmanteaus. The scene by Loch Ness was new to the sage, and he rises in his narrative a little to it and the 'limpid waters beating their bank, and waving their surface by a gentle agitation.' Through Glenshiel, Glenmorison, Auchnasheal, they passed on to the inn at Glenelg. They made beds for themselves with fresh hay, and, like Wolfe at Quebec, they had their 'choice of difficulties;' but the philosophic Rambler maintained they might have been worse on the hillside, and buttoning himself up in his greatcoat he lay down, while Boswell had his sheets spread on the hay, and his clothes and greatcoat laid over him by way of blankets.

Next day they got into a boat for Skye, reaching Armidale before one. Here occurred one of the dramatic episodes of the book. Sir Alexander Macdonald, husband of Boswell's Yorkshire cousin Miss Bosville, and the host at the masquerade in February, was on his way to Edinburgh, and met them at the house of a tenant, 'as we believe,' wrote Johnson to Mrs Thrale, 'that he might with less reproach entertain us meanly. Boswell was very angry, and reproached him with his

improper parsimony. Boswell has some thoughts of collecting the stories and making a novel of his life.' In the first edition of his book something strong had clearly been written, but it was wisely suppressed at the last moment when the book was bound, for the new pages are but clumsily pasted on the guard between leaves 166 and 169. The first edition had accordingly this account, which was even toned down in the next.

'Instead of finding the head of the Macdonalds surrounded with his clan, and a festive entertainment, we had a small company and cannot boast of our cheer. The particulars are minuted in my journal, but I shall not trouble the publick with them. I shall mention but one characteristick circumstance. My shrewd and hearty friend, Sir Thomas Blackett, Lady Macdonald's uncle, who had preceded us in a visit to this chief, upon being asked by him if the punchbowl then upon the table was not a very handsome one, replied, "Yes, if it were full." Sir Alexander, having been an Eton scholar, Dr Johnson had formed an opinion of him which was much diminished when he beheld him in the Isle of Sky, where we heard heavy complaints of rents racked, and the people driven to emigration. Dr Johnson said, "it grieves me to see the chief of a great clan appear to such disadvantage. The gentleman has talents, nay, some learning; but he is totally unfit for his situation. Sir, the Highland chiefs should not be allowed to go further south than Aberdeen." I meditated an escape from this the very next day, but Dr Johnson resolved that we should weather it out till Monday.'

Next day being Sunday Bozzy's spirits were cheered by the climate and the weather, but 'had I not had Dr Johnson to contemplate, I should have been sunk into

dejection, but his firmness supported me. I looked at him as a man whose head is turning giddy at sea looks at a rock.' Everywhere they met signs of the parting of the ways in the Highlands. The old days of feudal power were merging in the industrial, the chiefs were now landlords and exacting ones. Emigration was rife, and the pages of the *Scots Magazine* of the time dwell much on this. A month before, four hundred men had left Strathglass and Glengarry; in June eight hundred had sailed from Stornoway; Lochaber sent four hundred, 'the finest set of fellows in the Highlands, carrying £6000 in ready cash with them. The extravagant rents exacted by the landlords is the sole cause given for this emigration which seems to be only in its infancy.' The high price of provisions and the decrease of the linen trade in the north of Ireland sent eight hundred this year from Stromness, when we find the linen dealers thanking Boswell's old rival, as he supposed, with Miss Blair, Sir Alexander Gilmour, M.P. for Midlothian, for his efforts at providing better legislation.

Rasay is one of the happiest descriptions in the tour. 'This,' said Johnson, 'is truly the patriarchal life; this is what we came to find.' They heard from home and had letters. At Kingsburgh they were welcomed by the lady of the house, 'the celebrated Miss Flora Macdonald, a little woman of genteel appearance; and uncommonly mild and well-bred.' 'I was in a cordial humour, and promoted a cheerful glass. Honest Mr M'Queen observed that I was in high glee, "my governor being gone to bed." . . . The room where we lay was a celebrated one. Dr Johnson's bed was the very bed in which the grandson of the unfortunate King James the Second lay, on one of the nights after the failure of his rash attempt in 1745-6. To see Dr Samuel Johnson lying in that bed, in the Isle of Sky, in the house of



Miss Flora Macdonald, struck me with such a group of ideas as it is not easy for words to describe, as they passed through the mind. The room was decorated with a great variety of maps and prints. Among others, was Hogarth's print of Wilkes grinning, with a cap of liberty on a pole by him.' Certainly Bozzy had never thought of finding a remembrance of his 'classic friend' in such circumstances.

Dunvegan and the castle of the Macleods received them in hospitable style. 'Boswell,' said Johnson, in allusion to Sir Alexander's stinted ways, 'we came in at the wrong end of the island;' the memories of their visit had not been forgotten when Scott was there on his Lighthouse Tour in 1814. The Rambler 'had tasted lotus, and was in danger of forgetting he was ever to depart.'

Landing at Strolimus, they proceeded to Corrichatachin, 'with but a single star to light us on our way.' There took place the scene that, though familiar, must be given in the writer's own words. A man who, for artistic setting and colour, could write it deliberately down even to his own disadvantage, and who could appeal to serious critics and readers of discernment and taste against the objections which he saw himself would be raised from the misinterpretation of others, is a figure not to be met with every day in literature.

'Dr Johnson went to bed soon. When one bowl of punch was finished, I rose, and was near the door, on my way upstairs to bed; but Corrichatachin said, it was the first time Col had been in his house, and he should have his bowl; and would not I join in drinking it? The heartiness of my honest landlord, and the desire of doing social honour to our very obliging conductor, induced me to sit down again. Col's bowl was finished; and by that time we were well warmed. A third bowl was soon made, and that too was finished. We were cordial, and merry to a high degree; but of

what passed I have no recollection, with any accuracy. I remember calling *Corrichatachin* by the familiar appellation of *Corri* which his friends do. A fourth bowl was made, by which time Col, and young M'Kinnon, Corrichatachin's son, slipped away to bed. I continued a little time with Corri and Knockow; but at last I left them. It was near five in the morning when I got to bed. *Sunday, September 26.* I awaked at noon with a severe head-ach. I was much vexed that I should have been guilty of such a riot, and afraid of a reproof from Dr Johnson, I thought it very inconsistent with that conduct which I ought to maintain, while the companion of the Rambler. About one he came into my room, and accosted me, "What, drunk yet?" His tone of voice was not that of severe upbraiding; so I was relieved a little. "Sir," (said I), "they kept me up." He answered, "No, you kept them up, you drunken dog:"—this he said with good-humoured *English* pleasantry. Soon afterwards, Corrichatachin, Col, and other friends assembled round my bed. Corri had a brandy bottle and glass with him, and insisted I should take a dram. "Ay," said Dr Johnson, "fill him drunk again. Do it in the morning, that we may laugh at him all day. It is a poor thing for a fellow to get drunk at night, and skulk to bed, and let his friends have no sport." Finding him thus jocular, I became quite easy; and when I offered to get up, he very good naturedly said, "You need be in no such hurry now." I took my host's advice, and drank some brandy, which I found an effectual cure for my head-ach. When I rose, I went into Dr Johnson's room, and taking up Mrs M'Kinnon's Prayer-Book, I opened it at the twentieth Sunday after Trinity, in the epistle for which I read, "And be not drunk with wine, wherein there is excess." Some would have taken this as a divine interposition.'

Such is the extraordinary confession. St Augustine, Rousseau, De Quincey, have not quite equalled this. He found it had been made the subject of serious criticism and ludicrous banter. But his one object, as he tells 'serious criticks,' has been to delineate Johnson's character, and for this purpose he appeals from Philip drunk to Philip sober, and to the approbation of the discerning reader. Later on, he has laid the flattering

unction to his heart, and has extracted comfort from the soul of things evil. He felt comfortable, and 'I then thought that my last night's riot was no more than such a social excess as may happen without much moral blame; and recollected that some physicians maintained, that a fever produced by it was, upon the whole, good for health: so different are our reflections on the same subject, at different periods; and such the excuses with which we palliate what we know to be wrong.'

Leaving Skye, they ran before the wind to Col.

'It was very dark, and there was a heavy and incessant rain. The sparks of the burning peat flew so much about, that I dreaded the vessel might take fire. Then as *Col* was a sportsman, and had powder on board, I figured that we might be blown up. Our vessel often lay so much on one side, that I trembled lest she should be overset, and indeed they told me afterwards that they had run her sometimes to within an inch of the water, so anxious were they to make what haste they could before the night should be worse. I now saw what I never saw before, a prodigious sea, with immense billows coming upon a vessel, so that it seemed hardly possible to escape. I am glad I have seen it once. I endeavoured to compose my mind; when I thought of those who were dearest to me, and would suffer severely, should I be lost, I upbraided myself. Piety afforded me comfort; yet I was disturbed by the objections that have been made against a particular providence, and by the arguments of those who maintain that it is in vain to hope that the petitions of an individual, or even of congregations, can have any influence with the Deity. I asked *Col* with much earnestness what I could do. He with a happy readiness put into my hand a rope, which was fixed to the top of one of the masts, and told me to hold it till he bade me pull. If I had considered the matter, I might have seen that this could not be of the slightest service; but his object was to keep me out of the way. . . . Thus did I stand firm to my post, while the wind and rain beat upon me, always expecting a call to pull my rope. . . . They spied the harbour of Lochiern, and *Col* cried, "Thank God, we are safe!" Dr Johnson had all

this time been quiet and unconcerned. He had lain down on one of the beds, and having got free from sickness, was satisfied. The truth is, he knew nothing of the danger we were in. Once he asked whither we were going; upon being told that it was not certain whether to Mull or Col, he cried, "Col for my money!" I now went down to visit him. He was lying in philosophick tranquillity, with a greyhound of *Col's* at his back keeping him warm.'

Mull, Tobermory, Ulva's Isle, and Inch Kenneth followed. Then Iona,—'the sacred place which as long as I can remember, I had thought on with veneration.' The two friends, as they landed on the island, 'cordially embraced,' as they had done in the *White Horse* at Edinburgh, and the mark of feeling is a note that we are yet with them in the eighteenth century. They lay in a barn with a portmanteau for a pillow, and 'when I awaked in the morning and looked round me, I could not help smiling at the idea of the chief of the Macleans, the great English moralist, and myself lying thus extended in such a situation.' The old Boswell of the Roman Catholic days appears at this time. 'Boswell,' writes Johnson to Mrs Thrale, 'who is very pious went into the chapel at night to perform his devotions, but came back in haste for fear of spectres.' Second sight was often in their thoughts and conversation on their tour; at the club Colman had jocularly to bid Boswell 'cork it up' when he was too full of his belief on the point. His fear of ghosts reminds one of Pepys in the year of the great plague, as he went through the graveyard of the church, with the bodies buried thick and high, 'frighted and much troubled.'

'I left him,' says Boswell himself, 'and Sir Allan at breakfast in our barn, and stole back again to the cathedral, to indulge in solitude and devout meditation. When contemplating the venerable ruins, *I reflected with much satisfaction*, that the solemn scenes of piety

*never lose their sanctity and influence*, though the cares and follies of life may prevent us from visiting them. . . . I hoped that, ever after having been in this holy place, I should maintain an exemplary conduct. One has a strange propensity to fix upon some point of time from whence a better course of life may begin.' This is a revelation of the inner Boswell. On the eve of the appearance of the *Tour in Corsica*, he had written to Temple, about 'fixing some period for my perfection as far as possible. Let it be when my account of Corsica is finished. I shall then have a character to support.' On landing at Rasay, he noticed the remains of a cross on the rock, 'which had to me a pleasing vestige of religion,' and he 'could not but value the family seat more for having even the ruins of a chapel close to it. There was something comforting in the thought of being so near a piece of consecrated ground.'

Oban received them with a tolerable inn. They were again on the mainland, and found papers with conjectures as to their motions in the islands. Next day they spent at Inverary. The castle of the Duke of Argyll was near, and now, for the first time on the tour, the indefatigable agent in advance was completely non-plussed. The spectre of the great Douglas Trial loomed large in the eyes of the pamphleteer and the hero of the riot. He had reason, he says, to fear hostile reprisals on the part of the Duchess, who had been Duchess of Hamilton and mother of the rival claimant, before she had become the wife of John, fifth Duke of Argyll. It is from this scene and from the Stratford Jubilee fiasco that the general reader draws his picture of poor Bozzy, and the belief remains that James Boswell was a pushing and forward interloper, half mountebank and half showman. Read in the original, as a revelation of the writer's character, the very reverse is the impression;

he is there presented not in any ludicrous light but rather in a good-humoured and fussy way. He met his friend the Rev. John Macaulay, one of the ministers of Inverary, who accompanied them to the castle, where Boswell presented the doctor to the Duke. 'I shall never forget,' quaintly adds the chronicler, 'the impression made upon my fancy by some of the ladies' maids tripping about in neat morning dresses. After seeing for a long time little but rusticity, their lively manner, and gay inviting appearance, pleased me so much, that I thought, for a moment, I could have been a knight-errant for them.' This grandfather of the historian and essayist, the man who has dealt the heaviest blow to the reputation of poor Boszy, was to encounter some warm retorts from the Rambler like his brother, Macaulay's grand-uncle, the minister at Calder. Mr Trevelyan is eager for the good name of his family, and finds it impossible to suppress a wish that the great talker had been there to avenge them. It may not be quite impossible that, mingling with the brilliant essayist's ill-will to the politics of the travellers, there was an unconscious strain of resentment at the contemptuous way in which his relations had been tossed by the doctor, and that Boszy's own subsequent denunciations of the abolitionists and the slave trade had edged the memories in the mind of the son of Zachary Macaulay. Be this as it may, for this scene Macaulay has a keen eye, and as much of his colour is derived from it, it is but right that in some abridged form the incident be set down here in Boswell's own words—

'I went to the castle just about the time when I supposed the ladies would be retired from dinner. I sent in my name; and, being shewn in, found the amiable Duke sitting at the head of his table with several gentlemen. I was most politely received, and gave his grace some particulars of the curious journey which I had

been making with Dr Johnson. . . . As I was going away, the Duke said, "Mr Boswell, won't you have some tea?" I thought it best to get over the meeting with the Duchess this night; so respectfully agreed. I was conducted to the drawing-room by the Duke, who announced my name; but the duchess, who was sitting with her daughter, Lady Betty Hamilton, and some other ladies, took not the least notice of me. I should have been mortified at being thus coldly received, had I not been consoled by the obliging attention of the Duke.

'Monday, October 25. I presented Dr Johnson to the Duke of Argyll. . . . the duke placed Dr Johnson next himself at table. I was in fine spirits; and though sensible of not being in favour with the duchess, I was not in the least disconcerted, and offered her grace some of the dish that was before me. It must be owned that I was in the right to be quite unconcerned, if I could. I was the Duke of Argyll's guest; and I had no reason to suppose that he adopted the prejudices and resentments of the Duchess of Hamilton.

'I knew it was the rule of modern high life not to drink to anybody; but, that I might have the satisfaction for once to look the duchess in the face, with a glass in my hand, I with a respectful air addressed her,—“My Lady Duchess, I have the honour to drink your grace's good health.” I repeated the words audibly, and with a steady countenance. This was, perhaps, rather too much; but some allowance must be made for human feelings. I made some remark that seemed to imply a belief in *second sight*. The duchess said, “I fancy you will be a *methodist*.” This was the only sentence her grace deigned to utter to me; and I take it for granted, she thought it a good hit on *my credulity* in the Douglas Cause.

'We went to tea. The duke and I walked up and down the drawing-room, conversing. The duchess still continued to shew the same marked coldness for me; for which, though I suffered from it, I made every allowance, considering the very warm part that I had taken for Douglas, in the cause in which she thought her son deeply interested. Had not her grace discovered some displeasure towards me, I should have suspected her of insensibility or dissimulation. Her grace made Dr Johnson come and sit by her, and asked him why he made his journey so late in the year. “Why, madam (said he), you know Mr Boswell must attend the

Court of Session, and it does not rise till the 12th of August." She said, with some sharpness, "I *know nothing* of Mr Boswell." Poor Lady Lucy Douglas, to whom I mentioned this, observed, "She knew *too much* of Mr Boswell." I shall make no remark on her grace's speech, etc., etc.'

In all this scene it will be confessed there is nothing but rudeness on the part of the duchess, one of the beautiful Gunnings, intentional or otherwise, while the kindly touches on Boswell's part, his allowance for her supposed feelings over the trial, and his determination, for once, to look a duchess in the face, are admirable. Bozzy was by birth a gentleman, and there is not the slightest indication here of any want of breeding or taste on his side.

At Dumbarton, steep as is the incline, Johnson ascended it. The *Saracen's Head*, which had welcomed Paoli before now, received the travellers. There was now no more sullen fuel or peat. 'Here am I,' soliloquized the Rambler, with a leg upon each side of the grate, 'an *Englishman*, sitting by a coal fire.'

'Jamie's aff the hooks noo;' said the old laird, as they drew near Auchinleck, 'he's bringing doon an auld dominie.' Boswell begged of his companion to avoid three topics of discourse on which he knew his father had fixed opinions—Whiggism, Presbyterianism, and Sir John Pringle. For a time all went well. They walked about 'the romantick groves of my ancestors,' and Bozzy discoursed on the antiquity and honourable alliances of the family, and on the merits of its founder, Thomas, who fell with King James at Flodden. But the storm broke, over the judge's collection of medals, where that of Oliver Cromwell brought up Charles the First and Episcopacy. All must regret that the writer's filial feelings withheld the 'interesting scene in this dramattick sketch.' It is the one *lacuna* in the book.



Sir John Pringle, as the middle term in the debate, came off without a bruise, but the honours lay with Lord Auchinleck. The man whose 'Scots strength of sarcasm' could retort on Johnson, that Cromwell was a man that let kings know they 'had a *lith* in their neck,' was likely to open new ideas to the doctor, whose political opinions could not rank higher than prejudices. 'Thus they parted,' says the son, after his father had, with his dignified courtesy, seen Johnson into the postchaise; 'they are now in a happier state of existence, in a place where there is no room for *Whiggism*.' 'I have always said,' the doctor maintained, 'the first Whig was the Devil!'

Edinburgh was reached on November 9th. Eighty-three days had passed since they left it, and for five weeks no news of them had been heard. Writing from London, on his arrival, Johnson said, 'I came home last night, without any incommmodity, danger, or weariness, and am ready to begin a new journey. I know Mrs Boswell wished me well to go.' The irregular hours of her guest, and his habit of turning the candles downward when they did not burn brightly, letting the wax run upon the carpet, had not been quite to the taste of the hostess, who resented, 'what was very natural to a female mind,' the influence he possessed over the actions of her husband.

We may well call this tour a spirited one, as Boswell had styled his own Corsican expedition. No better book of travels in Scotland has ever been written than Boswell's *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*. The accuracy of his description, his eye for scenes and dramatic effects, have all been fully borne witness to by those who have followed in their track, and the fact of the book being day by day read by Johnson, during its preparation, gives it an additional value from the perfect

veracity of its contents—‘as I have resolved that the very journal which Dr Johnson read shall be presented to the publick, I will not expand the text in any considerable degree.’ If the way in which the Rambler roughed it, ‘laughing to think of myself roving among the Hebrides at sixty, and wondering where I shall rove at four score,’ is admirable, none the less so is Bozzy’s imperturbable good humour. ‘It is very convenient to travel with him,’ writes his companion from Auchinleck to Mrs Thrale, ‘for there is no house where he is not received with kindness and respect. He has better faculties than I had imagined; more justness of discernment and more fecundity of images.’ They had hoped to go sailing from island to island, and had not reckoned with what Scott, who wonders they were not drowned, calls the proverbial carelessness of Hebridean boatmen. They really had come two months too late. But Boswell’s attention to the old man smoothed all difficulties,—‘looking on the tour as a co-partnership between Dr Johnson and myself,’ he did his part faithfully, dancing reels, singing songs, and airing the scraps of Gaelic he picked up, thinking all this better than ‘to play the abstract scholar.’

Johnson’s account of the journey is an able performance, and is written with a lighter touch and grace than is to be found in his early works. One passage from it has become famous,—his description of Iona. ‘The man whose patriotism would not gain force upon the plain of Marathon, or whose piety would not grow warmer among the ruins of Iona,’ rivals Macaulay’s New Zealander as a stock quotation, and the whole book is not without incisive touches. But it is completely eclipsed by the *Journal* of Boswell. From start to finish there is not a dull page, and the literary polish is, we venture to think, of a higher kind than is

seen in the *Life*. The artistic opening, and the grouping of the characters, together with the wealth of archæological and historical information, the tripping style and sustained interest, all render this book of Boswell's a masterpiece. Johnson's account, published in 1775, took ten years to reach a second edition. Boswell's appeared in September, 1785; and by December 20 the issue was exhausted, a third followed on August 15, 1786, and the next year saw a German translation issued at Lubeck. There had been grave indiscretions, lack of reticence, and other faults in the book. Caricatures were rife. *Revising for the Second Edition* shewed Sir Alexander Macdonald seizing the author by the throat, and pointing with his stick to the open book, where two leaves are marked as torn out. But Boswell, in *The Gentleman's Magazine* for March 1786, asserts that no such applications or threats had been made. The results, however, may have added to the writer's unpopularity, as Lord Houghton suggests, at the Edinburgh bar, through the answers, replies, and other rejoinders to the strictures of Johnson, for which Boswell, as the pioneer and the introducer of the stranger, 'the chiel among them takin' notes,' may in Edinburgh society have been held as mainly responsible.

To Johnson, the memories of the tour—the lone shieling and the misty island—were a source of pleasing recollection. Taken earlier, it would have removed many of his insular prejudices by wider survey and more varied conversation. 'The expedition to the Hebrides,' he wrote to Boswell some years after, 'was the most pleasant journey I ever made;' and two years later, after restless and tedious nights, he is found reverting to it and recalling the best night he had had these twenty years back, at Fort Augustus. Yet all through September they had not more than a day and a

half of really good weather, and but the same during October. Out of such slight materials and uncomfortable surroundings has Boswell produced a masterpiece of descriptive writing. The memory of Johnson has lingered where that of the Jacobite Pretender has well-nigh completely passed away. Mr Gladstone, proposing a Parliamentary vote of thanks to Lord Napier for 'having planted the Standard of St George upon the mountains of Rasselas;' Sir Robert Peel, quoting, in his address to Glasgow University as Lord Rector, Johnson's description of Iona; Sir Walter Scott finding in Skye that he and his friends had in their memories, as the one typical association of the island, the ode to Mrs Thrale, all combine to shew the abiding interest attaching to the Rambler even in Abyssinia and to his footsteps in Scotland.

## CHAPTER VI

EDINBURGH LIFE—DEATH OF JOHNSON. 1773-1784

‘My father used to protest I was born to be a strolling pedlar.’—  
SIR WALTER SCOTT—*Autobiography*.

‘You have done Auchinleck much honour and have, I hope, overcome my father who has never forgiven your warmth for monarchy and episcopacy. I am anxious to see how your pages will operate on him.’ Boswell had good grounds for thus expressing himself to Johnson over the publication of the latter’s book. He had not long, it would seem, to wait for the breaking of the storm, as we find him writing to Temple in ominous language. ‘My father,’ he says, ‘is most unhappily dissatisfied with me. He harps on my going over Scotland with a brute (think how shockingly erroneous!) and wandering, or some such phrase, to London. I always dread his making some bad settlement.’ Then the old judge would grimly relate how Lord Crichton, son of the Earl of Dumfries, would go to Edinburgh, and how, when he was carried back to the family vault, the Earl, as he saw the hearse from the window, had said, ‘Ay, ay, Charles, thou went without an errand: I think thou hast got one to bring thee back again.’

But had the son chosen to be quite candid here, we should see how just a cause the father had for his displeasure. In the spring of 1774, he had written to

Johnson suggesting a run up to London, expressing the peculiar satisfaction which he felt in celebrating Easter at St Paul's, which to his fancy was like going up to Jerusalem at the feast of the Passover. The doctor was wisely deaf to this subtle appeal. 'Edinburgh,' said he, 'is not yet exhausted,' and reminded him that his wife, having permitted him last year to ramble, had now a claim upon him at home, while to come to Iona or to Jerusalem could not be necessary, though useful. Next year, however, Boswell was in London, 'quite in my old humour,' as he tells Temple, arguing with him for concubinage and the plurality of the patriarchs, from all which we may see that the plea urged to Johnson for the visit was to be taken in a lax sense by Boswell, who made his chief excuse out of some business at the bar of the House over an election petition in Clackmannan. He waited on Temple in Devon and shocked his host by his inebriety, but 'under a solemn yew tree' he had vowed reformation. But his return to town, if it 'exalted him in piety' at St Paul's, seems to have led but to fresh dissipation. He hints at 'Asiatic multiplicity,' but this is only when he has taken too much claret. The good resolutions at Iona and the influence of the ruins had passed away, the trip is extended to two months, and he frets irritably over his old friend Henry Dundas's election as King's Advocate,—'to be sure he has strong parts, but he is a coarse unlettered dog.' Harry Dundas at least was never found philandering as we find Bozzy on this occasion, where the mixture of religion and flirtation is so confusing. 'After breakfasting with Paoli,' he writes before leaving for the north, 'and worshipping at St Paul's, I dined *tête-à-tête* with my charming Mrs Stuart, of whom you have read in my Journal. We dined in all the elegance of two courses and a dessert, with dumb waiters, except when the second

course and the dessert were served. We talked with unreserved freedom, as we had nothing to fear. We were *philosophical*, upon honour—not deep, but feeling, we were pious; we drank tea and bid each other adieu as finely as romance paints. She is my wife's dearest friend, so you see how beautiful our intimacy is.' But from Johnson's letter to Mrs Thrale we see looming ahead a crisis. 'He got two and forty guineas in fees while he was here. He has by *his wife's persuasion and mine* taken down a present for his mother-in-law,'—an error, doubtless, for 'stepmother.' He had entered himself this time at the Temple, and Johnson was his bond. He left to be in time for practice before the General Assembly, finding 'something low and coarse in such employment, but guineas must be had'—a feeling quite different from that of Lord Cockburn who thought the aisle of St Giles had seen the best work of the best men in the kingdom since 1640. Perhaps his feelings on this point were soothed by the traveller in the coach, a Miss Silverton, an 'amiable creature who has been in France. I can unite little fondnesses with perfect conjugal love.' Alas for poor Peggie Montgomerie, 'of the ancient house of Eglintoun,' blamed by his father for not bridling the follies of his son, waiting, doubtless, anxiously for the present to the second wife of his father as a means of peace-offering!

Then the secret leaks out that the father had refused Boswell's plan of being allowed £400 a year and the trial of fortune at the London bar. His debts of £1000 had been paid, and his allowance of £300 threatened with the reduction of a third. The promise under the old yew had not been kept; the one bottle of hock as a statutory limit had been exceeded, he had been 'not drunk, but was intoxicated,'—a subtle point for bacchanalian casuists, and very ill next day. He lays

it on the drunken habits of the country which, he says, are very bad, and with the recollection of Burns' temptations in Dumfries we may admit that they were. His father, too, was now about to entail his estate, and Boszy's predilection for feudal principles and heirs male brought things to a deadlock. He appealed to Lord Hailes, who admitted conscience and self formed a strong plea when found on different sides. Finally, after the judge had inserted in the deed his precautions against 'a weak, foolish and extravagant person,' the estate was entailed on Boswell. 'My father,' he tells Temple, 'is so different from me. We *divaricate* so much, as Dr Johnson said. He has a method of treating me which makes me feel like a timid boy, which to *Boswell* (comprehending all that my character does in my own imagination and in that of a wonderful number of mankind) is intolerable. It requires the utmost exertion of practical philosophy to keep myself quiet; but it has cost me drinking a considerable quantity of strong beer to dull my faculties.' The picture of the son drinking himself down to the level of the father is truly inimitable!

He feared the final settlement. He might be disgraced by his father, and not a shilling secured to his wife and children. Then he is comforted by the thought that his father is visibly failing, and he consults his brother David with a view to a settlement, should the succession pass to him. The birth of a son, who was diplomatically called Alexander, was taken by the old man as a compliment, and we find Boswell visiting at Auchinleck, 'not long at one time, but frequent renewals of attention are agreeable,' he finds, to his father. He proposed to Johnson a tour round the English cathedrals, but a brief trip with him to Derbyshire was all that resulted. We now find for the first time in the *Life* indications of what would ensue when



the strong hand of Johnson was removed from the guidance of his weaker companion. 'As we drove back to Ashbourne,' he writes with curious frankness, 'Dr Johnson recommended to me, *as he had often done*, to drink water only,' and we meet with as curious a defence of drinking—the great difficulty of resisting it when a good man asks you to drink the wine he has had twenty years in his cellar! Benevolence calls for compliance, for, 'curst be the *spring*,' he adds with a change of Pope's verse, 'how well soe'er it flow, that tends to make one worthy man my foe!' 'I do,' he wrote in the *London Magazine* for March 1780, 'fairly acknowledge that I love drinking; that I have a constitutional inclination to indulge in fermented liquors, and that if it were not for the restraints of reason and religion, I am afraid that I should be as constant a votary of Bacchus as any man. Drinking is in reality an occupation which employs a considerable portion of the time of many people; and to conduct it in the most rational and agreeable manner is one of the great arts of living. Were we so framed that it were possible by perpetual supplies of wine to keep ourselves for ever gay and happy, there could be no doubt that drinking would be the *summum bonum*, the chief good to find out which philosophers have been so variously busied.' It looks as if poor Bozzy, when he wrote this, had heard of the Brunonian system of medicine, and of the unfortunate exemplification of it in practice and in precept by its founder in Edinburgh. No wonder such excesses produced violent reaction to low spirits and the 'black dog' of hypochondria. He finds it, after going to prayers in Carlisle Cathedral, 'divinely cheering to have a cathedral so near Auchinleck,' one hundred and fifty miles off, as Johnson sarcastically replied. Bozzy had been writing a series of articles,

'The Hypochondriack,' in the *London Magazine*, for about two years, but he was advised not to mention his own mental diseases, or to expect for them either the praise for which there was no room, or the pity which would do him no good. The active old man was now in better health than he had been upon the Hebridean tour, and was in hopes of yet shewing himself with Boswell in some part of Europe, Asia, or Africa. 'What have you to do with liberty and necessity?' cries the doctor to his friend, who had been worrying himself and his correspondent with philosophical questions, on which some six years before he had got some light from the *Lettres Persanes* of Montesquieu. 'Come to me, my dear Bozzy, and let us be as happy as we can. We will go again to the Mitre, and talk old times over.' Thrice during the 1781 visit to London do we see his unfortunate habits breaking out; and, when we find him saying he has unfortunately preserved none of the conversations, Miss Hannah More, who met him that day at the Bishop of St Asaph's, explains it—'I was heartily disgusted with Mr Boswell, who came upstairs after dinner much disordered with wine.'

Let us hear his own confession over his conduct at the house of Lady Galway.

'Another evening Johnson's kind indulgence towards me had a pretty difficult trial. I had dined at the Duke of Montrose's with a very agreeable party, and his Grace, according to his usual custom, had circulated the bottle very freely. Lord Graham and I went together to Miss Monckton's where I certainly was in extraordinary spirits, and above all fear or awe. In the midst of a great number of persons of the first rank, amongst whom I recollect with confusion a noble lady of the most stately decorum, I placed myself next to Johnson, and thinking myself now fully his match, talked to him

in a loud and boisterous manner, desirous to let the company know how I could contend with Ajax. I particularly remember pressing him upon the value of the pleasures of the imagination, and, as an illustration of my argument, asking him, "What, sir, suppose I were to fancy that the—(naming the most charming Duchess in his Majesty's dominions) were in love with me, should I not be very happy?" My friend with much address evaded my interrogatories, and kept me as quiet as possible, but it may be easily conceived how he must have felt.'

His father was now dying, and a London trip, which had been planned by Boswell for 1782, found the son at the very limit of his credit. 'If you anticipate your inheritance,' he was reminded, 'you can at last inherit nothing. Poverty (added the old *impransus* Johnson, out of the depths of his own experience), my friend, is so great an evil that I cannot but earnestly enjoin you to avoid it. Live on what you have; live, if you can, on less.' Lord Auchinleck died suddenly at Edinburgh, on August 30th, 1782; and it was unfortunate for Bozzy that neither at the death of his father nor of his mother, nor, as we shall see of Johnson, was he present. The evening of the old man's days had been, we are assured by Ramsay of Ochtertyre, clouded by the follies and eccentricities of his son. For thirty years he had been sorely tried; twice he had paid his debts, he had indulged him with a foreign tour, had provided him with every means of securing professional success at the bar, only to see that son do everything to miss it and become everything his father hated in life—a Tory, an Anglican, and a Jacobite. The new laird was anxious to display himself on a wider sphere. Johnson was now visibly failing, and was glad of someone to lean upon for little attentions. 'Boswell,' he said, 'I think I am easier with you than with almost anybody. Get

as much force of mind as you can. Let your imports be more than your exports, and you'll never go far wrong.' He reverted to the old days of the tour in a hopeful strain: 'I should like to come and have a cottage in your park, toddle about, live mostly on milk, and be taken care of by Mrs Boswell. She and I are good friends now, are we not?'

In 1783 Boswell appeared before the public with a *Letter to the People of Scotland*. It was on Fox's proposed bill to regulate the affairs of the East India Company. Against it he stands forth, 'as an ancient and faithful Briton, holding an estate transmitted to him by charters from a series of kings.' Guardedly Johnson admitted that 'your paper contains very considerable knowledge of history and of the constitution: it will certainly raise your character, though perhaps it may not make you a minister of state.' A copy to Pitt elicited the formal acceptance of thanks, but the exclusion of the bill Boswell took as proof of his own advocacy. He stood for Ayrshire, turning back from York when the dissolution was announced. 'Our Boswell,' wrote the doctor to Langton, 'is now said to stand for some place. Whether to wish him success his best friends hesitate.'

May found him with the Rambler for the last time. 'I intend,' he writes to Dr Percy, 'to be in London about the end of this month, chiefly to attend upon Dr Johnson with respectful affection. He has for some time been very ill with dropsical asthmatical complaints, which at his age are very alarming. I wish to publish as a regale to him a neat little volume—*The Praises of Doctor Samuel Johnson, by co-temporary writers*. Will your lordship take the trouble to send me a note of the writers who have praised our much respected friend?' The attentive Bozzy had written to all the leading men in the Edinburgh School of Medicine—Cullen, Hope,

Monro, and others. With the expectation that an increase of Johnson's pension would enable him to visit Italy, he consulted Sir Joshua Reynolds, and, with his approval, wrote to Thurlow the Chancellor. At the house of the painter they dined for the last time.

'I accompanied him in Sir Joshua Reynolds's coach, to the entry of Bolt Court. He asked me whether I would not go with him to his house ; I declined it, from an apprehension that my spirits would sink. We bade adieu to each other affectionately in the carriage. When he had got down upon the foot-pavement he called out, "Fare you well ;" and, without looking back, sprung away with a kind of pathetick briskness, if I may use that expression, which seemed to indicate a struggle to conceal uneasiness, and impressed me with a foreboding of our long, long separation.'

We think of the dying Cervantes, and the student-admirer of the All Famous and the Joy of the Muses—'parting at the Toledo bridge, he turning aside to take the road to Segovia.'

## CHAPTER VII

THE ENGLISH BAR—DEATH. 1784-1795

‘Ambition should be made of sterner stuff.’—JULIUS CÆSAR, iii. 2.

THERE is something unsatisfactory in the fact that Boswell was not with Johnson as he died. It gives to his book an air of something distinctly lacking, which is not with us as we close Lockhart's *Life of Scott*. His own account is that he was indisposed during a considerable part of the year, which may, or may not, be a euphemism for irregular habits; yet, when we consider how easily he might have been with his old friend, we must own to a feeling that Boswell's mere satisfaction at learning he was spoken of with affection by Johnson at the close does not satisfy the nature of things or the artistic sense of fitness. No literary executor had been appointed, and the materials for a biography had been mostly destroyed by Johnson's orders. This, we may be sure, had not been expected by Boswell, who set himself, however, to prepare for the press his own *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*, which his friend when alive had not been willing to see appear as a pendant to the *Journey*. ‘Between ourselves,’ he tells Temple, ‘he is not apt to encourage one to share reputation with him.’ Yet he felt, as he wrote to Percy on 20th March 1785, that it was a great consolation to him now that he had, as it was, collected so much of the wit and the wisdom of

that wonderful man. 'I do not expect,' he adds, 'to recover from it. I gaze after him with an eager eye; and I hope again to be with him.'

Now that the strong hand of Johnson was removed, 'and the light of his life as if gone out,' the rest of Boswell's life was but a downward course. He struggles with himself, and feels instinctively the lack of the curb which the powerful intellect of the Rambler had held on the weaker character of the other. We find him repeating often to himself the lines from the *Vanity of Human Wishes* :—

'Shall helpless man, in ignorance sedate,  
Roll darkling down the torrent of his fate?'

The Lord Advocate had brought into the Commons a bill for the reconstruction of the Court of Session, proposing to reduce the number of judges from fifteen to ten, with a corresponding increase of salary. The occasion was wildly seized by Boswell in May 1785 to issue a half-crown pamphlet, with the title, '*A letter to the People of Scotland*, on the alarming attempt to infringe the Articles of the Union, and introduce a most pernicious innovation, by diminishing the number of the Lords of Session.' This extraordinary production, intended doubtless as a means of recommendation of the author for parliamentary honours, can hardly now be read in the light of events by any sympathetic Boswellian but with feelings of sorrow and confusion. Its publication we may be sure would never have been sanctioned by Johnson.

After stating the foundation of the Court of Session, by James V. in 1532, on the model of the Parliament of Paris, he attacks Dundas for having in himself the whole power of a grand jury. 'Mr Edward Bright of

Malden, the fat man whose print is in all our inns, could button seven men in his waistcoat; but the learned lord comprehends hundreds.' He calls on the Scottish people not to be cowed: 'let Lowther come forth (we cannot emulate Boswell in the plenitude and the magnitude of his capital letters and other typographical devices), he upon whom the thousands of Whitehaven depend for three of the elements.' His own opposition he proclaims is honest, because he has no wish for an office in the Court of Session; he will try his abilities in a wider sphere. Rumours of a coalition in the county of Ayr between Sir Adam Ferguson and the Earl of Eglintoun he hopes are unfounded, 'both as an enthusiast for ancient feudal attachments, and as having the honour and happiness to be married to his lordship's relation, a true Montgomerie, whom I esteem, whom I love, after fifteen years, as on the day when she gave me her hand.' He assures the people they will have their objections to the bill supported by 'my old classical companion Wilkes, with whom I pray you to excuse my keeping company, he is so pleasant;' by Mr Burke, the Lord Rector of the University of Glasgow, and by 'that brave Irishman, Captain Macbride, the cousin of my wife.' In grandiose capitals he appeals to Fox and to Pitt. 'Great sir,' he cries, 'forgive my thus presumptuously, thus rashly, attempting for a moment to forge your thunder! But I conjure you—in the name of God and the King, I conjure you—to announce in your own lofty language, that there shall be a stop put to this conspiracy, which I fear might have the effect of springing a mine that would blow up your administration.' This letter 'hastily written upon the spur of the occasion is already too long,' yet he calls upon his countrymen to allow him to 'indulge a little more my own egotism and vanity, the indigenous plants



of my own mind.' His whole genealogy, Flodden and all, we hear over again. 'If,' he pertinently adds, 'it should be asked what this note has to do here, I answer to illustrate the authour of the text. And to pour out all myself as old Montaigne, I wish all this to be known.' After a eulogy of himself as no time-server, and his profession of readiness 'to discuss topicks with mitred St Asaph, and others; to drink, to laugh, to converse with Quakers, Republicans, Jews and Moravians,' he exhorts his friends and countrymen, in the words of his departed Goldsmith, who gave him many Attic nights and that jewel of the finest water, the acquaintance of Sir Joshua Reynolds, 'to fly from petty tyrants to the throne.' He declares himself a Tory, but no slave. He is in possession of an essay, dictated to him by Dr Johnson, on the distinction between Whig and Tory, and concludes with *eclat*, 'with one of the finest passages in John Home's noble and elegant tragedy of *Douglas*.'

No condensation of this, the most 'characteristical' of all his writings, can give the reader any idea of this extraordinary production. Once only does it deviate into sense when, on the last page, we find the advertisement of the *Tour to the Hebrides*, 'which was read and liked by Dr Johnson, and will faithfully and minutely exhibit what he said was the pleasantest part of his life.'

In the Hilary Term of 1786, he was called to the English bar, feeling it, as he said, 'a pity to dig in a lead mine, when he could dig in a gold one.' Johnson had always thrown cold water on the idea, though as early as February 1775, as we find from a letter of Boswell's to Strahan the printer, the idea had been proposed to him. In the May of 1786 he writes to Mickle, the translator of the *Lusiad*, that he is in a wavering state; he has the house of his friend Hoole,

and he still retains the use of General Paoli's residence in Portman Square. When he did finally take up his own quarters in Cavendish Square, the result was not what he had expected. He was discouraged by the want of practice, and the prospect of any. In fact, he was to feel what, as Malone says, Lord Auchinleck had all along told his son, that it would cost him much more trouble to hide his ignorance of Scotch and English law than to shew his knowledge. He feared his own deficiencies in 'the forms, quirks and quiddities,' which he saw could be learned only by early habit. He even doubted whether he should not be satisfied with being simply baron of Auchinleck with a good income in Scotland; but he felt that such a course could not 'deadens the ambition which has raged in my veins like a fever.' The Horatian motto inscribed on the front of Auchinleck House, telling of the peace of mind dearer than all to be found everywhere, if the mind itself is in its own place, was never appreciated, however, by the new laird.

His ignorance of law was soon shewn at the Lancaster assizes. Mr Leslie Stephen is inclined to view the story as being not very credible. Yet we fear the authority is indisputable. 'We found Jemmy Boswell,' writes Lord Eldon, 'lying upon the pavement—inebriated. We subscribed at supper a guinea for him and half a guinea for his clerk, and sent him next morning a brief with instructions to move for the writ of *Quare adhesit pavimento*, with observations calculated to induce him to think that it required great learning to explain the necessity of granting it. He sent all round the town to attorneys for books, but in vain. He moved, however, for the writ, making the best use he could of the observations in the brief. The judge was astonished, and the audience amazed. The judge said,

'I never heard of such a writ—what can it be that adheres *pavimento*? Are any of you gentlemen at the bar able to explain this?' The Bar laughed. At last one of them said, 'My Lord, Mr Boswell last night *adhæsit pavimento*. There was no moving him for some time. At last he was carried to bed, and he has been dreaming about himself and the pavement.' Lord Jeffrey once assisted Bozzy to bed in similar circumstances. 'You are a promising lad,' he told him next morning, 'and if you go on as you have begun, you may be a Bozzy yourself yet.' No wonder that we find him hesitating about going on the spring northern circuit, which would cost him, he says, fifty pounds, and oblige him to be in rough company for four weeks.

His only piece of promotion came from Lord Lonsdale. Pitt had been brought in by this nobleman for the pocket-borough of Appleby, and Bozzy had hopes of a Parliamentary introduction that way. Carlyle of Inveresk found this worthless patron of the unfortunate office seeker 'more detested than any man alive, as a shameless political sharper, a domestic bashaw, and an intolerable tyrant over his tenants.' Penrith and Whitehaven were in fear when he walked their streets; he defied his creditors; and the father of the poet Wordsworth died without being able to enforce his claims. The author of the *Rolliad* describes his power as

'Even by the elements confessed,  
Of mines and boroughs Lonsdale stands possessed;  
And one sad servitude alike denotes  
The slave that labours and the slave that votes.'

It was on this political boroughmonger and jobber that Boswell was now pinning his faith. The complete

dependence of him on Lonsdale in return for the Recordship of Carlisle did not escape the notice of the wits, who now found that the writer who had been declaring over the India Bill of Fox his devotion to the throne, the Tory, but no slave, had transferred his entire loyalty and abjectest protestations to 'his king in Westmoreland.' To add to his distress, his wife was dying. A short trial of London had led her to return to Ayrshire, and her husband was lost in doubt whether to revisit her or cling to 'the great sphere of England,' the whirl of the metropolis, in hopes that the great prize would at last be drawn. In the north he found her still lingering on, but in his eagerness to obtain political influence 'I drank so freely that riding home in the dark I fell from my horse and bruised my shoulder.' From London he was again summoned, but with his curious infelicity at such times of trouble, he was not in time to witness her death: 'not till my second daughter came running out from the house and announced to us the dismal event in a burst of tears.' Remorse found vent in an agony of grief. 'She never would have left me,' he cries to Temple; 'this reflection will pursue me to my grave.' In July, the widower of a month hastened north to contest the county, only to find Sir Adam Fergusson chosen. 'Let me never impiously repine,' is his cry of distress. 'Yet as "Jesus wept" for the death of Lazarus, I hope my tears at this time are excused. The woeful circumstance of such a state of mind is that it rejects consolation; it feels an indulgence in its own wretchedness.' His hustings appearances would appear to have been at least marked by fluency, for Burns, his junior by eighteen years, declares his own inability to fight like Montgomerie or 'gab like Boswell.'

As he draws to a close, the letters of Boswell improve

both in form and matter. It is painful to see him on every hand seeking the Parliamentary interest out of which he was all the while doing his best to write himself. No party could or would take him seriously. His rent-roll was over £1600, a large sum in these days, and it was yearly rising. Earnestly did his brother David press upon him a return to Auchinleck and the retrenchment of his expenses. But the spell of the lights of London was on him, and 'I could not endure Edinburgh,' he tells us, 'unless I were to have a judge's place to bear me up,' and that was a thing not to be dreamed of after the publication of the *Letter*. He dispersed his family to various schools, finding the eldest of the boys beginning to oppose him, 'and no wonder,' as he bitterly adds. Then the cry is forced from him in allusion to the famous passage in Shakespeare on Wolsey's hopes and fall—a passage which, curiously enough, we have come upon in the commonplace book which Boswell had kept as a boy—'O Temple, Temple, is this realizing any of the towering hopes which have so often been the subject of our letters. Yet I live much with a great man, who, upon any day that his fancy shall be inclined, may obtain for me an office.' Everywhere he casts about, trying the Lord Chancellor, not seeing the smallest opening in Westminster Hall, but buoyed up by 'the delusion that practice may come at any time.'

'We must do something for you,' Burke had said in a kindly way, 'for our own sakes.' He recommended him to General Conway, but though the place was not obtained the letter was valued by Boswell more. Writing to Mr Abercrombie in America, even as late as the July of 1793, he is found expressing 'a great wish to see that country; and I once flattered myself that I should be sent thither in a station of some

importance ;' and from a letter to Burke we learn that this expected post had been a commissionership in the treaty between America and Britain. Dundas was another of his hopes. 'The excellent Langton says it is disgraceful, it is utter folly in Pitt not to attach to his administration a man of my popular and pleasant talents.' Dundas, however, after having been given a margin of two months for a reply, has made no sign ; 'how can I delude myself? I will tell you,' he informs Temple, 'Lord Lonsdale shews me more and more regard. Three of his members assure me that he will give me a seat at the General Election.' Then that last reed was to break. At Lowther Castle, his wig was removed from his room, as a practical joke of a coarse order on the unoffending Boswell, and all the day he was obliged to go in his nightcap, which he felt was very ill-timed to one in his situation. The loss of the wig the unsuspecting victim declares will remain as great a secret as the writer of the letters of Junius, but ere long the tyrant whom he had invoked as the man of Macedonia to help Scotland has undeceived him. 'I suppose you thought,' he roughly said, 'I was to bring you into Parliament? I never had any such intention.' It is impossible not to feel for Boswell at this crisis. 'I am down at an inn,' he writes to Temple, 'and ashamed and sunk on account of the disappointment of hopes which led me to endure such grievances. I deserve all that I suffer. I am at the same time distracted what to do in my own county. I am quite in a fever. O my old and most intimate friend, I intreat you to afford me some consolation, and pray do not divulge my mortification. I now resign my Recordership, and shall get rid of all connection with this brutal fellow.' His last Parliamentary venture was cut short by the reflection how small was his following. How

curiously after all this reads his own little autobiographical sketch in the *European Magazine*! 'It was generally supposed that Mr Boswell would have had a seat in Parliament; and indeed his not being amongst the Representatives of the Commons is one of those strange things which occasionally happen in the complex operations of our mixed Government. That he has not been *brought into Parliament* by some great man is not to be wondered at when we peruse his publick declaration.' Not to be wondered at, truly, though the writer chose to refer the wonder to his independence. Then the reader is informed how he had been a candidate at the general election for his own county of Ayr, 'where he has a very extensive property and a very fine place of which there is a view and description in Grose's *Antiquities of Scotland*.' The conclusion of the sketch relates how, at the last Lord Mayor's day, he sang with great applause a state-ballad of his own composition, entitled *The Grocer of London*. This was the last shot in the political locker. At a Guildhall dinner, given to Pitt by the worshipful company of grocers, Boswell contrived to get himself called upon for a song. He rose, and delivered himself of a catch on the model of Dibdin's 'Little cherub that sits up aloft,' prefaced and interlarded by an address to the guest of the evening. Honoured as he had been on his continental tour at the courts of Europe, yet never till to-night had he felt himself so flattered as now he was, in the presence of the minister he admired, and to whose home and foreign policy he gave a hearty, if discriminating support. Boswell for his song was encored six times, till the cold features of the minister were seen to relax in a smile, amid the general roar of plaudits and laughter! After this 'state ballad,' a copy of which was last seen at Lord Houghton's sale, Boszy and a

friend, in a state of high glee, returned to their lodgings, shouting all the way *The Grocer of London!* 'He has declared,' adds the complacent autobiographer, 'his resolution to persevere on the next vacancy.'

All this time his great work was slowly advancing. At the end of the *Journal* had appeared a notice: 'preparing for the Press, in one volume quarto, the *Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.*, by James Boswell, Esq.' The note proceeds to sketch the plan; the collecting of materials for more than twenty years, his desire to erect to him a literary monument, the interweaving of 'the most authentick accounts' that can be obtained from those who knew him, etc. To his chagrin, Mrs Thrale's volume of anecdotes had been out before him, and Sir John Hawkins had been commissioned by the London booksellers to produce a *Life*, which had duly appeared. Not even the unequivocal success and merits of the *Journal* could induce 'the trade' to take Boswell seriously. No one had thought of him, any more than Gay would have been thought of as the biographer of the circle to which he had been admitted. Percy, even Sir William Scott, had been successively approached, but none had given a consideration to 'Johnson's Bozzy.' Such neglect, however, must have spurred him to exertion. The lively lady's anecdotage, dateless and confused, he could afford to despise as 'too void of method even for such a farrago,' as Horace Walpole said of it. But the solemn Hawkins, as an old friend and executor of Johnson's will, was a more dangerous rival. 'Observe how he talks of me,' cries Boswell querulously, 'as quite unknown.' No doubt Sir John was 'unclubable,' and by Reynolds, Dyer, Percy, and Malone he was detested. Yet his book, though eclipsed by Boswell's, is not unmeritorious; but for his allusion to 'Mr Boswell, a native of Scotland,' he has been made to



pay severely by systematic castigation from his rival, who now doggedly, as Johnson would have said, set himself to the work before him. Wherever first-hand information could be had, he was constantly on the track. Miss Burney has told how she met him at the gate of the choir of St George's chapel at Windsor—'his comic-serious face having lost none of its wonted singularity, nor yet his mind and language.' She had letters from Johnson, and he must have some of the doctor's choice little notes: 'We have seen him long enough upon stilts, I want to shew him in a new light. He proposed a thousand curious expedients to get them, but I was invincible.' The approach of the king and queen broke off the interview, but next morning he was again on the watch. We must regret that they were not given, however much his indiscretions had made people chary of their confidences. 'Jemmy Boswell,' writes Lord Eldon, 'called upon me, desiring to know my definition of taste. I told him I must decline defining it, because I knew he would publish it.' To secure first-hand, sifted, and 'authentick' material this man, so long decried by sciolists as merely a fool with a note-book, would forego every rebuff or refusal. 'Boswell,' says Horace Walpole, 'that quintessence of busy-bodies called on me last week, and was let in when he should not have been. After tapping many topics, to which I made as dry answers as an unbribed oracle, he vented his errand; 'had I seen Dr Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*?'

During the progress of the *Life* he turned aside to his last literary vagary—*No Abolition of Slavery; or the Universal Empire of Love*, 1791. This long-lost brochure has this year been rediscovered, but it will add little interest to his life, as its main tenets had long been known. A writer in the *Athenæum* for May 9th

describes it as quarto in form, and dedicated to Miss B——, whom he identifies with Miss Bagnal to be shortly mentioned. On the three topics of slavery, the Middlesex election, and America, Bozzy differed respectfully but firmly from the doctor, who drank at Oxford to the next insurrection of the negroes in the West Indies. Accordingly he stands stoutly by the planters and the feudal scheme of subordination, whose annihilation he maintains would 'shut the gates of mercy on mankind.' For his apparent inconsistency Burke is attacked :—

' Burke, art thou here, too? thou whose pen  
Can blast the fancied rights of men.  
Pray by what logic are those rights  
Allow'd to Blacks,—denied to Whites? '

Others may fail their king and country, but he as a throne and altar Tory calls all to know that

' An ancient baron of the land  
I by my king shall ever stand.'

He was now at last near the haven. The mass of his papers and materials had been arranged, after a labour which, as he tells Reynolds, was really enormous. The capacity for sustained effort, when set to it, of which he had boasted over his condensation of the evidence in the great Douglas case, stood him now in good service amid all his vexations, dissipations and follies.

In February 1788 we hear of his having yet seven years of the life to write. By January 1789 he had finished the introduction and the dedication to Sir Joshua Reynolds, both of which had appeared difficult, but he was confident they had been well done. To

excite the interest in his coming book, or as Mr Leslie Stephen thinks, to secure copyright, he published in 1790 two quarto parts at half a guinea each—the letter to Chesterfield and the conversation of Johnson with the king. By December he has had additional matter sent him from Warren Hastings, and he hoped to be out on 8th March, but the January of the new year found him with still two hundred pages of copy, and the death not yet written. Yet many a time, as he writes Temple, had he thought of giving it up. To add to his troubles, he had indulged in landed speculations, paying £2500 for the estate of a younger branch; he had been lending money to a cousin, and if he could but raise a thousand pounds on the strength of his book, he should be inclined to hold on, or ‘game with it,’ as Sir Joshua said. Neither Reynolds nor Malone, however, took the hint; and at the latter’s door he cast longing looks as he passed. He tells him he had been in the chair at the club, with Fox ‘quoting Homer and Fielding to the astonishment of Jo. Warton.’ He had bought a lottery ticket with the hopes of the prize of £5000, but—blank! The advance he needed was got elsewhere, and the property in his book saved. April finds him correcting the last sheet. He feared the result: ‘I may get no profit, the public may be disappointed, I may make enemies, even have quarrels. But the very reverse of all this may happen.’ Then on the 19th he writes to Dempster: ‘my *magnum opus*, in two volumes quarto, is to be published on Monday, 16th May’—by a lucky chance it was the anniversary of the red day in Boswell’s calendar, his meeting with Johnson eight and twenty years before! ‘When it is fairly launched, I mean to stick close to Westminster Hall, and it will be truly kind if you recommend me appeals or causes of any sort.’

The rest of his life is soon told. Paoli was now again in Corsica. When Mirabeau had recalled the exiles, the general had been made by Louis XVI. military commandant of the island. Johnson, also, was gone, and the two strongest checks upon the excesses of Boswell were removed. Piteous it is to find him writing to Malone: 'that most friendly fellow Courtenay, begging the pardon of an M.P. for so free an epithet,' had taken him in hand, and had taken his word that for some months his daily allowance of wine should not exceed four good glasses at dinner, and a pint after it. The qualifying adjective 'good' is dangerous, and before the time for the bill was half expired, Bozzy has closed it and the amendment. The state of his affairs, the loss of his wife bore heavily on him, together with 'the disadvantage to my children in having so wretched a father—nay, the want of absolute certainty of being happy after death, the *sure* prospect of which is frightful.' Then a fitful gleam of the old Adam breaks out. He has heard of a Miss Bagnal, 'about seven and twenty, lively and gay, a Ranelagh girl, but of excellent principles insomuch that she reads prayers to the servants in her father's family every Sunday evening.' Another matrimonial scheme was the daughter of the late Dean of Exeter, 'a most agreeable woman *d'un certain âge*,' as he engagingly adds, 'and with a fortune of £10,000.' The preparation of a second edition of the *Life* for July 1793 raised his spirits, but after a while he had run into excess, been knocked down and robbed. This he vows shall be a crisis in his life, and Temple's apprehension of his friend being carried off in a state of intoxication he finds awful to contemplate. Early in 1795 the end is announced by Temple's son writing to his father—'a few nights ago Mr Boswell returned

from the Literary Club, quite weak and languid ;' and the last letter to Temple from his correspondent of thirty-seven years is dated 8th April : 'I would fain write to you in my own hand, but really cannot.' His son James finishes the letter, to tell that the patient 'feels himself a good deal stronger to-day.' He was attended by Dr Warren, who had been with Johnson as he died. Some slight hopes of a recovery had been held out ; and, with the ruling passion strong in death to interview a celebrity, he rallied in a letter to Warren Hastings. With the spirit on him of the days when he had told Chatham that his disinterested soul had enjoyed the contemplation of the great minister in the bower of philosophy, he tells him, 'the moment I am able to go abroad, I will fly to Mr Hastings and expand my soul in the purest satisfaction.' On May 19th 1795, at two in the morning, after an illness of five weeks, he died. He was in his fifty-fifth year.

A life which cannot challenge the world's attention—like that of John Sterling—which perhaps does not even modestly solicit it, yet one which no less certainly will be found to reward the critic of literary history and pathology. A complex, weak, unsteady life enough, and no one did more than Boswell himself to bring into glaring prominence the faults that lie on the surface, by that frank, open, and ostentatious peculiarity which he avowed, and which he compared to the characteristics of the old seigneur, Michael de Montaigne. Never was there a franker critic of James Boswell, Esq., than himself ; 'the most unscottified of mortals,' as Johnson called him, has little or none of the reserve and reticence that are generally supposed to be marks of the national character. A rare and curious *Epistle in Verse*, by the Rev. Samuel Martin of Monimail, 1795, touches on the main points of his life, and the

author, who was apparently a friend of Boswell, had learned 'with affectionate concern and respect that at the end prayer was his stay.' He criticises, in rather halting and prosaic lines,

'The prison scenes, his prying into death,  
How felons and how saints resign their breath;  
How varying and conflicting passions roll,  
How scaffold exhibitions shew the soul.'

He laments his 'injuriously hilarity,' his degrading himself as 'the little bark, attendant on the huge all-bearing ark,' his political and ecclesiastical aberrations from the surer and better standpoints of his family and country. The feeling of this friend of Boswell would represent, we cannot doubt, the verdict at the time of his own circle.

The 'prison scenes' are an integral part in Boswell's psychology. Never did George Selwyn attend them with greater regularity, or Wyndham run after prize fights more assiduously. In the *Public Advertiser*, April 25, 1768, we find him writing: 'I myself am never absent from a publick execution. When I first attended them, I was shocked to the greatest degree . . . convulsed with pity and terror. I feel an irresistible impulse to be present at every execution, as there I behold the various effects of the near approach of death.' The parallels of Charles V., Philip II., Philip IV., Charles II. of Spain, will not escape the reader, and strangely, or rather naturally enough, Boswell is found disagreeing with the censure pronounced by Johnson on the celebration of his own obsequies in his lifetime by Charles V. In the *St James' Gazette* of April 20, 1779, he is found actually riding in the cart to Tyburn with Hackman, the murderer of Miss Ray, and writing to the papers over the feeling of 'unusual

Depression of Spirits, joined with that Pause, which so solemn a warning of the dreadful effects that the Passion of Love may produce must give all of us who have lively Sensations and warm Tempers.' But he suddenly deviates into business when he adds that 'it is very philosophically explained and illustrated in the *Hypochondriack*, a periodical Paper, peculiarly adapted to the people of England, and which comes out monthly in the *London Magazine*, etc.' In his Corsican tour we had seen him interviewing the executioner in the island, and some days before his final parting with Johnson he had witnessed the execution of fifteen men before Newgate and been clouded in his mind by doubts as to whether human life was or was not mere machinery and a chain of planned fatality. These cravings are clearly the marks of a mind morbidly affected and diseased, the result of the Dutch marriage as Ramsay believed. All through his life Boswell is conscious of his 'distempered imagination,' and the letters to Temple are scattered with irrelevances and repetitions, fatuities and inconsistencies that can be explained only on the score of mental disease. Were any doubts possible on this point, the expressions of his opinions on religion would dispel them. His 'Popish imagination,' quickened as it may have been by the escapade with the actress, was but the natural outcome of an ill-balanced mind. His feelings about consecrated places, *loca solennia* such as Iona, and Wittenberg, Rasay and Carlisle, we have seen. He delighted, says Malone, in what he called *the mysterious*, leading Johnson on ghosts, and kindred subjects. He was a believer in second sight: 'it pleases my superstition,' he tells Temple, 'which you know is not small, and being not of the gloomy but the grand species is an enjoyment.' When his uncle John died,

we learn he was 'a good scholar and affectionate relative, but had no conduct. And, do you know, he was not confined to one woman; he had a strange kind of religion, but I flatter myself he will be ere long, if he is not already, in heaven!' He comforts himself constantly over life being a mere state of purification, and looks forward to a condition of events in which 'a man can soap his own beard and enjoy whatever is to be had in this transitory state of things.' He is for ever questioning Johnson upon purgatory, 'having much curiosity to know his notions on that point.' One of the last authentic glimpses of Boswell is his being found in the company of Wilberforce, going west, with a night-cap in his pocket, on some visit to a friend such as Miss Hawkins says he was but too fond of doing,— 'away to the west as the sun went down'—doubtful of future punishment, but resolute in maintaining the depravity of man. It would almost appear as if Bozzy had read himself into Butler's doctrine that our present life is a state of probation for a future one, but had forgotten the qualification 'that our future interest is now depending on ourselves.'

The very influence of Johnson himself may have affected the weaker mind of Boswell injuriously. Both suffered from hypochondria, though that of the latter was far distant from the affliction of Johnson whom Dr Adams found 'in a deplorable state, sighing, groaning, talking to himself, and restlessly walking from room to room.' Temple maintained that the effect of Johnson's company had been of a depressing nature to his friend, and Sir Wm. Forbes believed that some slight tincture of superstition had been contracted from his companionship with the sage. The 'cloudy darkness,' as he himself calls it, of his mind, the weakness and the confusion of moral principles manifest enough



in the Temple correspondence, are better revealed in the conversation with Johnson at Squire Dilly's, 'where there is always abundance of excellent fare and hearty welcome.' 'Being in a frame of mind which, I hope for the felicity of human nature, many experience,—in fine weather,—at the country-house of a friend,—consoled and elevated by pious exercises, I expressed myself with an unrestrained fervour to my "guide, philosopher, and friend;" My dear Sir, I would fain be a good man; and I am very good now. I fear God, and honour the King; I wish to do no ill, and to be benevolent to all mankind.' He looked at me with a benignant indulgence; but took occasion to give me wise and salutary caution. 'Do not, sir, accustom yourself to trust to *impressions*.' Boswell had surely forgotten all this when he cries bitterly to Temple that he was inclined to agree with him in thinking 'my great oracle did allow too much credit to good principles, without good practice.' Perhaps he remembered Johnson's appreciation of Campbell, the good pious man that never passed a church without pulling off his hat, all which shewed 'he has good principles.' Boswell had, unfortunately, been 'caught young' by the sceptical talk of Dempster, Hume, and Wilkes, and his extended Continental ramble had impaired the earlier views under which he had been reared.

But James Boswell deserves at the hands of his readers and of critics better treatment than has been measured out to him in the contemptuous estimate of Macaulay, and, still worse, in the shrill attack of the smaller brood 'whose sails were never to the tempest given,' but who have, by the easy repetition of a few phrases and an imperfect acquaintance with the writings and character of the man they decry, come to the complacent depreciation which, as Niebuhr

said, is ever so dear to the soul of mediocrity. If James Boswell was not like Goldsmith, a great man, as Johnson finely pronounced, whose frailties should not be remembered, nor was, perhaps, in any final sense a great writer, yet for twenty years he had been the tried friend of the man who at the Mitre had called out to him, 'Give me your hand, I have taken a liking to you.' A plant that, like Goldsmith also, 'flowered late,' he has created in literature and biography a revolution, and produced a work whose surpassing merits and value are known the more that it is studied.

## CHAPTER VIII

### IN LITERATURE

‘Eclipse is first, the rest nowhere.’—MACAULAY.

‘How delicate, decent is English Biography,’ says Carlyle, ‘bless its mealy mouth! A Damocles sword of Respectability hangs for ever over the poor English Life-writer (as it does over poor English Life in general), and reduces him to the verge of paralysis. Thus it has been said there are no English lives worth reading, except those of Players, who by the nature of the case have bidden Respectability good-day. The English biographer has long felt that, if in writing his man’s biography he wrote down anything that could by possibility offend any man, he had written wrong.’ The biographer, as Mr Froude found out for a commentary on all this, is placed between a Scylla and Charybdis, between what is due to the subject, and what is expected by the public. If something is left out of the portrait, the likeness will be imperfect; if the anxiety or the inquisitiveness of readers to know private details is left ungratified, the writer will be met by the current cant that the public has a right to know. The line is not easily drawn, and few subjects for the biographer can ever desire to be as candidly dealt with by him as Cromwell acted with Sir Peter Lely, in the request to be painted as he was, warts and all. Thus,

too often the result will be but biography written *in vacuo*, 'the tragedy of Hamlet with the part of Hamlet omitted—by particular desire.'

Biography, like History, has suffered from considerations of dignity and propriety. The writers of the Hume and Robertson school of history, in their stately minuet with the historical muse, have been careful to exclude everything that seemed beneath the dignity of the sceptred pall; biographers have as consciously studied the proprieties. 'The Muse of history,' says Thackeray, 'wears the mask and speaks to measure; she too in our age busies herself with the affairs only of kings. I wonder shall history ever pull off her periwig and cease to be Court-ridden? I would have History familiar rather than heroic, and think that Mr Hogarth and Mr Fielding will give our children a much better idea of the manners of the present age in England, than the *Court Gazette* and the newspapers which we get thence.' As the historian has striven to obscure the real nature of the Grand Monarque, by confining his action to courts and battlefields, so the biographer, in his desire of never stepping beyond the proper, has enveloped his hero in a circle of correct ideas, after the manner of George the Fourth and his multiplicity of waistcoats. Dignity and respectability have ruined alike the historian and the biographer.

Lockhart foresaw that some readers would accuse him of trenching upon delicacy and propriety over his sixth and seventh chapters in the *Life of Scott*, and the circumstances were after all such as, had choice been permitted him, he might easily have omitted, considering it his duty to tell what he had to say truly and intelligibly. Of all men Macaulay had nothing to fear from any rational biography that should

ever be written of him, yet has not Mr Trevelyan assured his readers that the reviewers had told him, that he would much better have consulted his uncle's reputation by the omission of passages in his letters and diaries? Such criticism, as he justly says, is to seriously misconceive the province and the duty of the biographer, and his justification is that the reading world has long extended to the man the just approbation which it so heartily extended to his books. The Latin critics assigned history,—and accordingly history in miniature, biography,—to the department of oratory. The feeling, in consequence, has long prevailed of regarding biography as the field for the display of every other feeling than veracity. It has been emotional, or it has been decorously dull. To all such writers the style adopted by Boswell would appear, and justly appear, revolutionary. The cry is raised of there being nothing sacred, of the violation of domestic privacy, of the sanctities of life being endangered, of indiscretions, and violations of confidences, by the biographer. Accordingly, just as Macaulay decided that, in general, tragedy was corrupted by eloquence, and comedy by wit, so biography and history have suffered from the dignity of Clio. Boswell was perfectly aware what he was doing, nor did he awake to find himself famous for a method into which the sciolists pretend he only unconsciously blundered. In the preface to the third edition of the *Journal* he writes:—‘Remarks have been industriously circulated in the publick prints by shallow or envious cavillers, who have endeavoured to persuade the world that Dr Johnson’s character has been *lessened* by recording such various instances of his lively wit and acute judgment, on every topic that was presented to his mind. In the opinion of every person of taste and knowledge that I have con-

versed with, it has been greatly *heightened*; and I will venture to predict, that this specimen of his colloquial talents will become still more valuable, when, by the lapse of time, he shall have become an *ancient*; and no other memorial of this great and good man shall remain but the following Journal.' This is not the writing of one who has been without a clear idea of what he was undertaking, and of his own qualifications for the task. 'You, my dear sir,' he tells Sir Joshua Reynolds in the dedication, 'perceived all the shades which mingled in the grand composition; all the peculiarities and slight blemishes which marked the literary Colossus.' The inclusion of the letters and of private details was an integral part of his scheme. When he introduced the subject of biography at Dr Taylor's, no doubt with his own book in his eye, he said that in writing a man's life the man's peculiarities should be mentioned because they mark his character. When he resolved on their publication, he thought it right to ask Johnson explicitly on this point, and the reply was what in 1773 the doctor had given to Macleod in Skye, when he had asked if Orrery had done wrong, to expose the defects of Swift with whom he had lived in terms of intimacy. 'Why, no, sir,' Johnson had decided, 'after the man is dead, for then it is done historically.' A biographer that would omit or disguise the relations of Nelson to Lady Hamilton, would be justly suspected of disingenuousness, and Lockhart, especially in his treatment of the political side of his subject,—for example in the notorious *Beacon* incident—is but too open to this charge. But disingenuousness is a charge that never could have occurred to Boswell, whose veracity is the prime quality that has made him immortal. When the *Journal* was in the press, Hannah

More, studious of the name of the moralist and the sage, 'besought him to mitigate his asperities.' 'I will not,' said Boswell roughly, but wisely for posterity, 'cut off his claws, nor make a tiger a cat to please anyone.'

Boswell's books are veritable books. Few books have had such a severe test applied to them. His first was dedicated to Paoli, whose sanction must be taken to guarantee every line of it. "In every narrative," he writes in the dedication to Malone of the *Journal*, "whether historical or biographical, authenticity is of the utmost consequence. Of this I have ever been so firmly persuaded that I inscribed a former work to that person who was the best judge of its truth. Of this work the manuscript was daily read by Johnson, and you have perused the original and can vouch for the strict fidelity of the present publication." His *Life of Johnson* was as fearlessly dedicated to Sir Joshua Reynolds, one whose intimacy with Johnson could stamp, with assured knowledge of the subject, the credit and success of the work. Among the 'some dozen, or baker's dozen, and those chiefly of very ancient date,' of reliable biographies whose paucity Carlyle laments, the works of Boswell may be safely included. Their accuracy is confessed by workers in all fields. His *Tour* created a type; no better volume of travels has ever been written than the *Journal*; and the critic who has dealt at the reputation of Boswell its heaviest blow has yet to confess, that Homer is no more the first of poets, Shakespeare the first of dramatists, Demosthenes the first of orators, than Boswell is the first of biographers, with no second.

How is this? Written in 1831, before Lockhart Southey and Carlyle by their biographies of Scott, Nelson, and Frederick had appeared as rivals, why is it no less true now? What singular gift or quality can

account for this singular aloofness from the ordinary or extraordinary class of writers? Why does Boswell yet wear the crown of indivisible supremacy in biography? His own words will not explain it, the possession of Johnson's intimacy, the twenty years' view of his subject, his faculty for recollecting, and his assiduity in recording communications. This and more than this Lockhart possessed, the nearest rival to the biographical throne. He was the son-in-law of his subject, for whom he had as true an admiration as Boswell had for Johnson. But Boswell was only in the company of his idol some 180 days, or 276 if we include the time on the tour in Scotland, in all the twenty years of his acquaintance. Lockhart had the journals of Sir Walter, and the communications of nearly a hundred persons. A comparison in any sense, literary, social, or moral, would have been felt by Lockhart as an insult, for he clearly regards Sir Alexander Boswell as a greater man than his father. But if, like the grandsire of Hubert at Hastings, Lockhart has drawn a good bow, Boswell, like the Locksley of the novelist, has notched his shaft, and comparisons have long ceased to be instituted. Gray has attempted the explanation—a fool with a note-book. ✓ He has invented nothing, he has only reported. But every year sees that person at work, with his *First Impressions of Brittany, Three Weeks in Greece*, and the everlasting *Tour in Tartanland*. These are the creations of the note-book, but it has given them no permanence. The tourist puts in everything he sees, truly enough, or thinks he sees. But it is the art of Boswell to select 'the characteristical,' and the typical, ✓ to group and to dramatize. Ninety-four days he spent on the northern tour, and the result is a masterpiece. Pepys is garrulous, often vulgar, always lower-middle-class; but Boswell writes like a gentleman. ✓



Macaulay has explained it by a paradox. Goldsmith was great in spite of his weaknesses, Boswell by reason of his ; if he had not been a great fool, he would never have been a great writer. He was a dunce, a parasite, a coxcomb, a Paul Pry, had a quick observation, a retentive memory, and accordingly—he has become immortal ! Alas for the paucity of such immortals under so common circumstances ; their number should be legion ! That a fool may occasionally write interesting matter we know ; but that a man should write a literary classic, graced by arrangement, selection, expression, is not even paradox but hyperbole run mad. The truth is, Macaulay had no eye for such a complex character as Boswell. Too correct himself, too prone to the cardinal virtues and consistency, to follow one who, by instinct, seemed to anticipate Wendell Holmes' advice—'Don't be consistent, but be simply *true*'—and too sound politically in the field where Boswell and the doctor abased themselves in absurd party spirit, Macaulay can no more understand sympathetically the vagaries of Boswell than Mommsen or Drumann can follow the political inconsistency of Cicero. He had no Boswellian 'delight in that intellectual chemistry which can separate good qualities from evil in the same person ;' and in his essay on *Milton* he has disclaimed explicitly all such hero-worship of the living or the dead and denounced Boswellism as the most certain mark of an ill-regulated intellect. Nor had he, or Carlyle either, before him the evidence of the letters to Temple.

Carlyle, in the theory of hero-worship, has made capital use of Boswell. He sees the strong mind of Johnson leading 'the poor flimsy little soul' of James Boswell ; he feels 'the devout Discipleship, the gyrating observantly round the great constellation.' He has

Boswell's reiterated declarations to support him. On one side Carlyle's vindication of the biographer is successful; he errs in emphasizing the discovery by Boswell of the Rambler. In such a discovery Langton and Beauclerk had long preceded him, and the Johnson that Boswell met in Davies' parlour was the pensioned writer who had out-lived his dark days, and was the literary dictator of the day, and the associate of Burke and of Reynolds. But Carlyle comes nearer the truth when he touches on the Boswellian recipe for being graphic—the possession of an open, loving heart, and what follows from the possession of such. Like White of Selborne, with his sparrows and cockchafers, Boswell, too, has copied some true sentences from the inspired book of nature.

✓ But however this may account for his insight—the heart seeing farther than the head—it will not account for his literary qualities. Of all his contemporaries, Goldsmith and Burke excepted, no one is a greater master of a pure prose style than Boswell, and for ease of narrative, felicity of phrase, and rounded diction he is incomparable. Macaulay believed a London apprentice could detect Scotticisms in Robertson; Hume's style is often vicious by Gallicisms and Scots law phrases which nothing but his expository gifts have obscured from the critics. Beattie confesses learning English as a dead language and taking several years over the task. But Boswell, 'scarce by North Britons now esteemed a Scot,' writes with an ease that renders his style his own. 'The fact is,' says Mr Cotter Morison, 'that no dramatist or novelist of the whole century surpassed or even equalled Boswell in rounded and clear and picturesque presentation, or in real dramatic faculty.'

Let us take one portrait from the Boswell gallery—

the meeting of the two old Pembroke men, Johnson and Oliver Edwards.

'It was in Butcher Row that this meeting happened. Mr Edwards, who was a decent-looking elderly man in gray clothes and a wig of many curls, accosted Johnson with familiar confidence, knowing who he was, while Johnson returned his salutation with a courteous formality, as to a stranger. But as soon as Edwards had brought to his recollection their having been at Pembroke College together nine-and-forty years ago, he seemed much pleased, asked where he lived, and said he should be glad to see him in Bolt Court. EDWARDS: "Ah, sir! we are old men now." JOHNSON (who never liked to think of being old): "Don't let us discourage one another." EDWARDS: "Why, Doctor, you look stout and hearty. I am happy to see you so; for the newspapers told us you were very ill." JOHNSON: "Ay, sir, they are always telling lies of *us old fellows*."

Wishing to be present at more of so singular a conversation as that between two fellow collegians, who had lived forty years in London without ever having chanced to meet, I whispered to Mr Edwards that Dr Johnson was going home, and that he had better accompany him now. So Edwards walked along with us, I eagerly assisting to keep up the conversation. Mr Edwards informed Dr Johnson that he had practised long as a solicitor in Chancery. . . . When we got to Dr Johnson's house and were seated in his library, the dialogue went on admirably. EDWARDS: "Sir, I remember you would not let us say *prodigious* at College. For even then, sir (turning to me), he was delicate in language, and we all feared him." JOHNSON (to Edwards): "From your having practised the law long, sir, I presume you must be rich." EDWARDS: "No, sir; I had a good deal of money; but I had a number of poor relations to whom I gave great part of it." JOHNSON: "Sir, you have been rich in the most valuable sense of the word." EDWARDS: "But I shall not die rich." JOHNSON: "Nay, sure, sir, it is better to *live* rich, than to *die* rich." EDWARDS: "I wish I had continued at College." JOHNSON: "Why do you wish that, sir?" EDWARDS: "Because I think I should have had a much easier life than mine has been. I should have been a parson, and had a good living, like Bloxam and several others, and lived comfortably."

JOHNSON : "Sir, the life of a parson, of a conscientious clergyman, is not easy. I have always considered a clergyman as the father of a larger family than he is able to maintain. I would rather have Chancery suits upon my hands than the cure of souls." Here, taking himself up all of a sudden, he exclaimed, "O ! Mr Edwards ! I'll convince you that I recollect you. Do you remember our drinking together at an ale-house near Pembroke Gate?" . . .

EDWARDS : "You are a philosopher, Dr Johnson. I have tried too in my time to be a philosopher ; but, I don't know how, cheerfulness was always breaking in."—Mr Burke, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Mr Courtenay, Mr Malone, and, indeed, all the eminent men to whom I have mentioned this, have thought it an exquisite trait of character. The truth is, that philosophy, like religion, is too generally supposed to be hard and severe, at least so grave as to exclude all gaiety. EDWARDS : "I have been twice married, Doctor. You, I suppose, have never known what it was to have a wife." JOHNSON : "Sir, I have known what it was to have a wife, and (in a solemn, tender, faltering tone) I have known what it was to *lose a wife*. It had almost broke my heart."

EDWARDS : "How do you live, sir ? For my part, I must have my regular meals, and a glass of good wine. I find I require it." JOHNSON : "I now drink no wine, sir. Early in life I drank wine : for many years I drank none, I then for some years drank a great deal." EDWARDS : "Some hogsheads, I warrant you." JOHNSON : "I then had a severe illness, and left it off. I am a straggler. I may leave this town and go to Grand Cairo, without being missed here or observed there." EDWARDS : "Don't you eat supper, sir ?" JOHNSON : "No, sir." EDWARDS : "For my part, now, I consider supper as a turnpike through which one must pass, in order to get to bed." JOHNSON : "You are a lawyer, Mr Edwards. Lawyers know life practically. A bookish man should always have them to converse with. They have what he wants." EDWARDS : "I am grown old, I am sixty-five." JOHNSON : "I shall be sixty-eight next birthday. Come, sir, drink water, and put in for a hundred." . . . Mr Edwards, when going away, again recurred to his consciousness of senility, and looking full in Johnson's face, said to him, "You'll find in Dr Young,

'O my coevals ! remnants of yourselves.'

Johnson did not relish this at all; but shook his head with impatience. Edwards walked off seemingly highly pleased with the honour of having been thus noticed by Dr Johnson. When he was gone, I said to Johnson I thought him but a weak man. JOHNSON: "Why, yes, sir. Here is a man who has passed through life without experience: yet I would rather have him with me than a more sensible man who will not talk readily. This man is always willing to say what he has to say."

How admirable is the art in this scene, how numerous and fine are the strokes of character, and the easy turn of the dialogue! No fool with a note-book, no tippling reporter, as the shallow critics say, could have written this. To them there would have appeared in a chance meeting of two old men nothing worthy of notice, yet how dramatically does Boswell touch off the Philistine side of Edwards, and insert the fine shading and the inimitable remarks about the setting up for the philosopher, and supper being a turnpike to bed! This art of the biographer is what gives a memorableness to slight incidents, by the object being real and really seen; it is the 'infinitude of delineation, the intensity of conception which informs the Finite with a certain Infinitude of significance, ennobling the Actual into Idealness.'

Openness of mind will do much, but there must be the seeing eye behind it. For the mental development of Boswell, there is no doubt that, as with Goldsmith, his foreign travels had done much. As Addison in the *Freeholder* had recommended foreign travel to the fox-hunting Tory squires of his day as a purge for their provincial ideas, Boswell shares with the author of the *Traveller* and the *Deserted Village* cosmopolitan instincts and feelings. 'I have always stood up for the Irish,' he writes, 'in whose fine country I have been hospitably and jovially entertained, and with whom I

feel myself to be congenial. In my *Tour in Corsica* I do generous justice to the Irish, in opposition to the English and Scots.' Again, 'I am, I flatter myself, completely a citizen of the world. In my travels through Holland, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Corsica, France, I never felt myself from home; and I sincerely love every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.' This is the very antithesis to Johnson, whose frank confession was, 'for anything that I can see, foreigners are fools.'

Yet Boswell's stock of learning was small. 'I have promised,' he writes in 1775, 'to Dr Johnson to read when I get to Scotland; and to keep an account of what I read. He is to buy for me a chest of books, of his choosing, off stalls, and I am to read more, and drink less—that was his counsel.' The death of his wife forces the confession, 'how much do I regret that I have not applied myself more to learning,' and he acknowledges to their common friend Langton that, if Johnson had said that Boswell and himself did not talk from books, this was because he had not read books enough to talk from them. In his manuscripts there are many misspellings. He assigns to Terence a Horatian line and, in a letter to Garrick, quotes as Horatian the standard *mens sana in corpore sano* of Juvenal. More strange is his quoting in a note an illustration of the phrase 'Vexing thoughts,' without his being apparently aware that the words are by Rous of Pembroke, the Provost of Eton, whose portrait in the college hall he must often have seen, the writer of the Scottish Metrical Version of the Psalms. Yet his intellectual interests were keen. Late in life he has 'done a little at Greek; Lord Monboddo's *Ancient Metaphysics* which I am reading carefully helps me to recover the language.' He has his little scraps of irritat-

ing Latinity which he loves to parade, and when he dined at Eton, at the fellows' table, he 'made a considerable figure, having certainly the art of making the most of what I know. I had my classical quotations very ready.' Besides, the easy allusiveness of Boswell to books and to matters beyond the scope of general readers, his interest in all things going forward in the Johnsonian circle, his shewing himself in some metaphysical points—predestination, for example—fully a match for Johnson, and his own words in the *Journal*—'he had thought more than anybody supposed, and had a pretty good stock of general learning and knowledge'—all conspire to shew that, if he had no more learning than what he could not help, James Boswell was altogether, as Dominie Sampson said of Mannering, 'a man of considerable erudition despite of his imperfect opportunities.'

Nor were his entire interests Johnsonian. Scattered through his writings we find allusions to other books, in a more or less forward stage of completeness, and of which some must have been destroyed by his faithless executors. We hear of a *Life of Lord Kames*; an *Essay on the Profession of an Advocate*; *Memoirs of Hume* when dying, 'which I may some time or other communicate to the world;' a quarto with plates on *The Beggar's Opera*; a *History of James IV.*, 'the patron of my family;' a *Collection of Feudal Tenures and Charters*, 'a valuable collection made by my father, with some additions and illustrations of my own;' an *Account of my Travels*, 'for which I had a variety of materials collected;' a *Life of Sir Robert Sibbald*, 'in the original manuscript in his own writing;' a *History of the Rebellion of 1745*; an edition of *Walton's Lives*; a *Life of Thomas Ruddiman*, the Latin grammarian; a *History of Sweden*, where three of his

ancestors had settled, who took service under Gustavus Adolphus; an edition of *Johnson's Poems*, 'a complete edition, in which I shall with the utmost care ascertain their authenticity, and illustrate them with notes and various readings;' a work on *Addison's Poems*, in which 'I shall probably maintain the merit of Addison's poetry, which has been very unjustly depreciated.' His *Journal*, which is unfortunately lost, he designed as the material for his own *Autobiography*. A goodly list, and a varied one, involving interest, knowledge, and research, fit to form the equipment of a professed scholar.

Boswell foresaw the danger, and he justified his method of reporting conversations. 'It may be objected by some persons, as it has been by one of my friends, that he who has the power of thus exhibiting an exact transcript of conversations is not a desirable member of society. I repeat the answer which I made to that friend:—'Few, very few, need be afraid that their sayings will be recorded. Can it be imagined that I would take the trouble to gather what grows on every hedge, because I have collected such fruits as the *Nonpareil* and the *Bon Chretien*? On the other hand, how useful is such a faculty, if well exercised! To it we owe all those interesting apophthegms and *memorabilia* of the ancients, which Plutarch, Xenophon, and Valerius Maximus, have transmitted to us. To it we owe all those instructive and entertaining collections which the French have made under the title of *Ana*, affixed to some celebrated name. To it we owe the *Table-Talk* of Selden, the *Conversation* between Ben Jonson and Drummond of Hawthornden, Spence's *Anecdotes* of Pope, and other valuable remains in our own language. How delighted should we have been, if thus introduced into the company of Shakespeare and of Dryden, of



whom we know scarcely anything but their admirable writings! What pleasure would it have given us, to have known their petty habits, their characteristick manners, their modes of composition, and their genuine opinion of preceding writers and of their contemporaries!

The world in consideration of what it has gained, and the recollection of what we should have acquired had such a reporter been found for the talk of other great men, has long since forgiven Boswell, and forgotten also his baiting the doctor with questions on all points, his rebuffs and his puttings down—‘there is your *want*, sir; I will not be put to the question;’ his watching ‘every dawning of communication from that illuminated mind;’ his eyes goggling with eagerness, the mouth dropt open to catch every syllable, his ear almost on the shoulder of the doctor, and the final burst of ‘what do you do there, sir,—go to the table, sir,—come back to your place, sir.’

And these conversations which he reported in his short-hand, yet ‘so as to keep the substance and language of discourse?’ How far did he Johnsonize the form or matter? The remark by Burke to Mackintosh, that Johnson was greater in Boswell’s books than in his own, the absence of the terse and artistic touch to the sayings of the Rambler in the pages of Hawkins, Thrale, Murphy and others, suggest inevitably that they have been touched up by their reporter. The *Boswelliana* supplies here some slight confirmation of this, for there have been preserved in that collection stories that reappear in the *Life*, and the final form in which they appear in the later book is always that of a pointed and improved nature. It would, therefore, seem that Boswell, whose imitations of Johnson Mrs Thrale declared in some respects superior to Garrick’s, in his

long devotion to the style and manner of his friend, 'inflated with the Johnsonian ether,' did consciously or otherwise add much to the originals, and so has denied himself a share of what would otherwise be justly, if known, set down to his credit.

'I own,' he writes in 1789 to Temple, 'I am desirous that my life should tell.' He counted doubtless on the *Autobiography* for this purpose. 'It is a maxim with me,' said the great Bentley, 'that no man was ever written out of reputation but by himself.' At first sight it would appear that Boswell had inflicted upon his own fame an indelible blot. From whom but himself should we ever have learned those failings, of which Macaulay has deftly made so much in his unsympathetic writing down of the man, after the manner of the Johnsonian attack on Milton and Gray? In whom but himself should we detect the excrescences in his works—the permutations and combinations in shaving, the wish for a pulley in bed to raise him, his puzzle over the disproportionate wages of footmen and maid-servants, his boastings, his family pride, his hastily writing in the sage's presence Johnson's parody of Hervey in the *Meditations on a Pudding*, his superstitions, and his weaknesses? It is this that has cost him so dear with the critics, and the superior people, 'empty wearisome cuckoos, and doleful monotonous owls, innumerable jays also and twittering sparrows of the housetops.' He compares his own ideas to his handwriting, irregular and sprawling; his nature to Corinthian brass, made up of an infinite variety of ingredients, and his head to a tavern which might have been full of lords drinking Burgundy, but has been invaded by low punch-drinkers whom the landlord cannot expel. Blots and inequalities there are in the great book. Cooper off the prairie, Galt out of Ayrshire, are not more untrue to themselves ✓

than is Boswell at such moments. But 'within the focus of the Lichfield lamps' he regains his strength like a Samson.

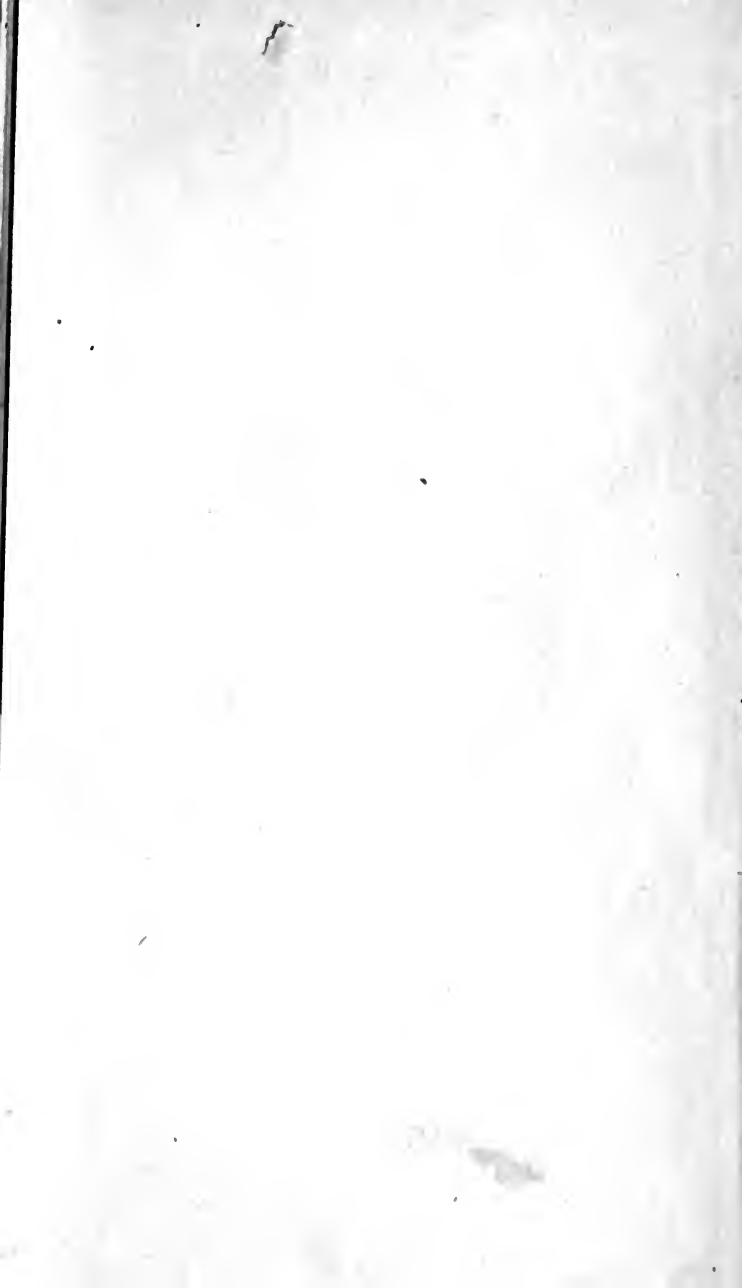
Boswell, with all his experience, never attained the mellow Sadduceeism of the diner-out. As a reward, he never lost the literary conscience, the capacity for labour, the assiduity and veracity that have set his work upon a pedestal of its own. The dedication to Reynolds, a masterly piece of writing, will shew the trouble that he took over his method, 'obliged to run half over London in order to fix a date correctly.' And he knew the value of his work, which the man with the note-book never does. In his moments of self-complacency he could compare his *Johnsoniad* with the *Odyssey*; and he will not repress his 'satisfaction in the consciousness of having largely provided for the instruction and entertainment of mankind.' Literary models before him he had none. Scott suggests the life of the philosopher Demophon in Lucian, but Boswell was not likely to have known it. He modestly himself says he has enlarged on the plan of Mason's *Life of Gray*; but his merits are his own. For the history of the period it is, as Cardinal Duperron said of Rabelais, *le livre—the book*—'in worth as a book,' decides Carlyle, 'beyond any other production of the eighteenth century.'

Time has dealt gently with both Johnson and Boswell. 'The chief glory of every people,' said the former in the preface to his *Dictionary* 'arises from its authors: whether I shall add anything to the reputation of English literature must be left to time.' In the constituency of the present no dead writer addresses such an audience as Johnson does. Of Johnson Boswell might have said, as Cervantes did of his great creation Don Quixote, he and his subject were born for each

other. There is no greater figure, no more familiar face in our literature than 'the old man eloquent'; and as the inseparable companion 'held in my heart of hearts, whose fidelity and tenderness I consider as a great part of the comforts which are yet left to me,' rises the figure of his biographer, the Bozzy no more of countless follies and fatuities, but Boswell, the prince of biographers, the inheritor of unfulfilled renown, now become, like his hero himself, an ancient. And they are still in the heyday of their great fame. Along the stream of time the little bark, as he hoped, sails attendant, pursues the triumph and partakes the gale.

With James Boswell it has happened, as Mark Pattison says of Milton, to have passed beyond the critics into a region of his own. That 'mighty civil gentlewoman,' the mistress of the *Green Man* at Ashbourne, M. Killingley, who waited on him with the note of introduction to his extensive acquaintance—'a singular favour conferr'd on one who has it not in her power to make any other return but her most grateful thanks, &c.,'—is but a symbol of the feelings of the readers who ever wish well to the name and the fame of James Boswell.

THE END.



Amant

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